JOHN BYRNE

#71

FROM SHE-HULK TO BATMAN — AND BEYOND!

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

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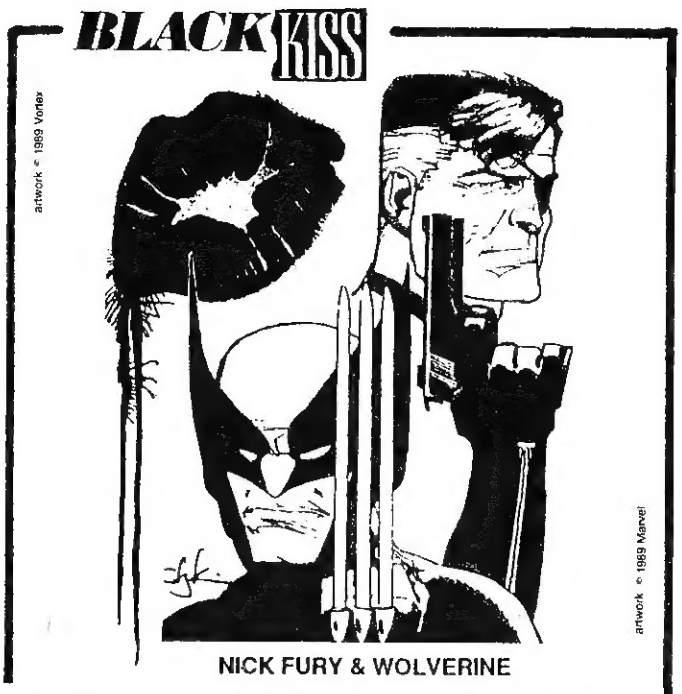

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UP FRONT

Once upon a time, long ago and far away, I was associate editor of Marvel's black-and-white horror magazines, in the days of such memorable titles as VAMPIRE TALES, MONSTERS UNLEASHED and, yes, TALES OF THE ZOMBIE. I also wrote various short full-scripts for those self-same magazines, after the fashion of the time, in the company of **Moench, McGregor** and many another.

Around that time, too, another department at Mighty Marvel harbored one **Duffy Vohland** (since deceased). Duffy's vocabulary consisted of just two words: **John Byrne.** Whenever an emergency cover assignment arose, a series needed a fill-in issue pencilled, or some merchandising job needed a spot illustration, Duffy would materialize and utter those two words in a monotone: **John Byrne.**

Back then, **Byrne's** abilities were not at all that evident to any but **Vohland,** and he was trapped in the Phantom Zone known as Charlton Comics.

Finally, I think more to spare himself from Duffy's unending monotony than anything, an editor yielded. **Tony Isabella** gave **Byrne** a script.

One of mine.

I found out the day I was greeted in the bullpen by a senior editor, who shall remain nameless (to save him embarrassment, for reasons which shall become obvious) wringing his hands in sympathy as if I had just lost a loved one. "It's terrible," he said solemnly, "I'm sorry. Take a look — if you don't like it, we'll reject it and I'll have someone else do the art."

After an opening like that, the art itself didn't look half bad, and I said so. Not that I took one look and said, "Hey, this is the guy who should soup up the She-Hulk!" (After all, she not only didn't exist back then, but I hadn't written two dozen issues of her first series yet). Still, grudgingly, the senior editor took my word.

And that's how I came to write **John Byrne's** first ever story for Marvel Comics — "Dark Asylum" — which, owing to the aforementioned senior editor's extreme antipathy, was relegated to a drawer where it languished, unpublished, until I sneaked it into print in the back of a color comic annual, GIANT-SIZE DRACULA #5 (for all you completists).

Now, John is back at Marvel again — after his stint revitalizing Superman at DC — and back in COMICS INTERVIEW with his most in-depth interview since our big all-**Byrne** issue #25. As always, he's got plans (and opinions) a-plenty.

Welcome back, John.

-Dave

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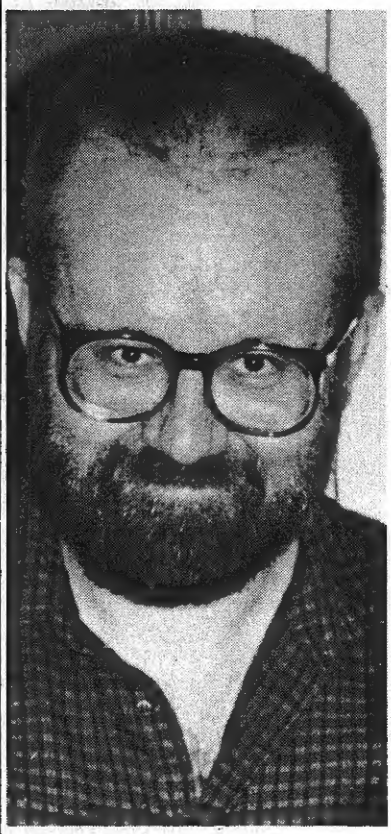
JOHN BYRNE



a walk on the wild side with dwight jon zimmerman *in which the celebrated writer/artist ruminates on everything from why dc comics needs* jim shooter *to what's new for wolverine.*
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LETTERS:
THE LAST WORD
hark! the herald letterhacks sing!
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Photo by Andy Byrne

"I was on the TODAY SHOW, quoted in US magazine,

JOHN BYRNE

Pencil panel by John (Wolverine #17, his first).

Well, here we go again. Since COMICS INTERVIEW #25, with its totally awesome book-length interview with Marvel's John Byrne, time has not stood still, not by a long shot. In the intervening years, in case any of you weren't paying attention, the time came for John to not only leave THE FANTASTIC FOUR, but to leave Marvel and take on DC's MAN OF STEEL, in the process garnering the attention of the "real world." Then, after Byrning up Superman — sorry, John, I couldn't resist — he returned to Marvel in time to reshape the New Universe line with an explosive experiment worthy of the maddest of mad comics creators. And nowadays he's bringing the Byrne touch to the Avengers, both books, and his new and improved, ever controversial but will she ever turn gray, She-Hulk. If you think you've seen it all, well think again . . .

DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN: *John, first I want to talk about She-Hulk. Your treatment of her now is different than what you did in FF.*

JOHN BYRNE: Yes.

DWIGHT: *Could you elaborate on why, the genesis of this new version of the She-Hulk?*

JOHN: It all began when I started looking around Marvel for something to do. **Mark Gruenwald** said, "Why don't you do a new SHE-HULK book?" Inasmuch as the first SHE-HULK hadn't been tremendously successful — sorry, David *(Laughter)* — I wanted *something* to make it different, some kind of hook —you know, some kind of Hollywood high concept, 25 words or less expresses the whole book. And I've *always* been fascinated by plays and movies and whatnot where they break the fourth wall and talk to the audience, so I came back to Mark and I said, "She knows she's in a comic book." Of course everybody went, "Oh, you mean like MOONLIGHTING." I said, "Like MOONLIGHTING, like BURNS AND ALLEN, like **Shakespeare**, like the Greeks." So the whole point was to make it a crazy kind of book — basically very simple, old-time Marvel stories, good guy hits bad guy kind of stories, but in the context of her knowing that she's in a comic book. So she addresses the reader, she steps across panel borders, in the issue I just finished she actually rips out the back of the panel in order to get to the next page — just to make it about 180 degrees from everything that I had done before.

DWIGHT: *This of course gives rise to the continuity within the Marvel Universe. Is this like a deliberate challenge on your part?*

JOHN: As far as I'm concerned it takes place in the Marvel Universe. It's right there, it's the same villains, the same supporting cast, the same characters that we've seen in other stories, all of this *recognizable* Marvel stuff. I'm *hoping* that . . . for example when I use the

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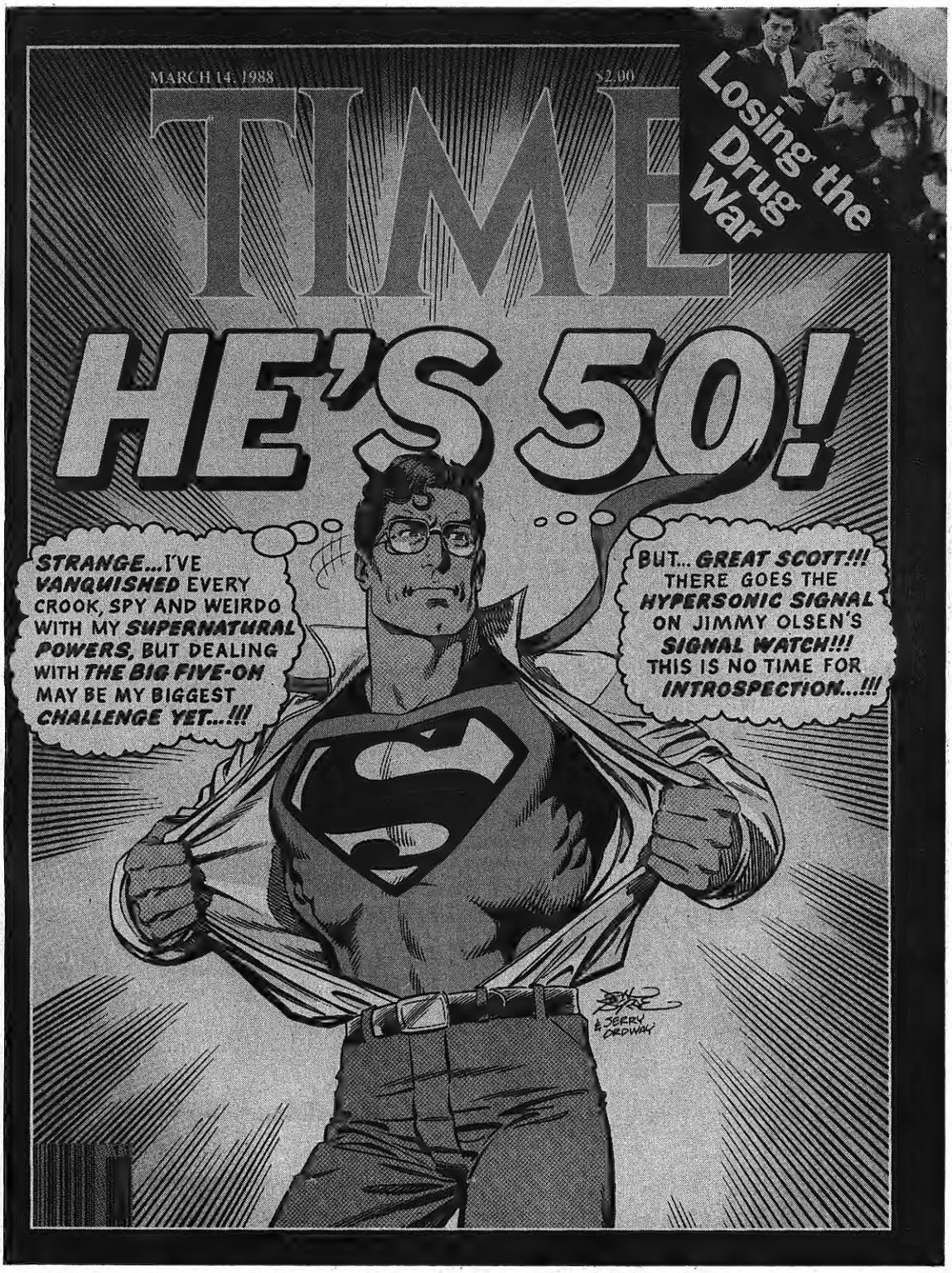
did the cover of TIME — I hated that cover."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TIME
Losing the Drug War
HE'S 50!
STRANGE... I'VE VANQUISHED EVERY CROOK, SPY AND WEIRDO WITH MY SUPERNATURAL POWERS, BUT DEALING WITH THE BIG FIVE-OH MAY BE MY BIGGEST CHALLENGE YET...!!!
BUT... GREAT SCOTT!!! THERE GOES THE HYPERSONIC SIGNAL ON JIMMY OLSEN'S SIGNAL WATCH!!! THIS IS NO TIME FOR INTROSPECTION...!!!
& JERRY ORDWAY

Stiltman, it would be nice if the next person who uses the Stiltman makes some reference to him having fought She-Hulk, that kind of thing, so that we *know* that it's firmly grounded in the Marvel Universe. She makes reference to the Marvel Universe, hopefully the Marvel Universe makes reference to her, but it's bananas. That I hope will drive

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"Shooter said it wasn't okay. It was 'do as I say, not as I do.'"

people crazy more than anything else, the fact that it's very clearly the Marvel Universe.

DWIGHT: *Why is Wyatt Wingfoot gone?*

JOHN: They told me I couldn't use Wyatt. That was very strange. They said that the whole thing with Wyatt hadn't been mentioned in the three years or whatever since I left THE FANTASTIC FOUR, so they thought it would be confusing to readers to have this boyfriend who hadn't been mentioned in all of this time. Then they said, "Anyway, there's a graphic novel that has Wyatt in it." So I can't use Wyatt.

DWIGHT: *Who said —*

JOHN: Mark and Tom. They said I can't use Wyatt because Wyatt's being used over here in the SHE-HULK graphic novel, so I was confused but I said all right. I was going to write him out anyway. Not immediately, I was planning on picking up essentially the continuity that I had left behind, assuming since it hadn't been mentioned then it hasn't changed. But the attitude was that since it hadn't been mentioned, it's best *left* unmentioned. I was going to bring Wyatt in, originally he was right there on the splash page of #1, and he was going to hang around for five or six issues and I would then phase him out and phase in the character that I decided would be the more or less *ongoing* romantic interest, which is Hercules.

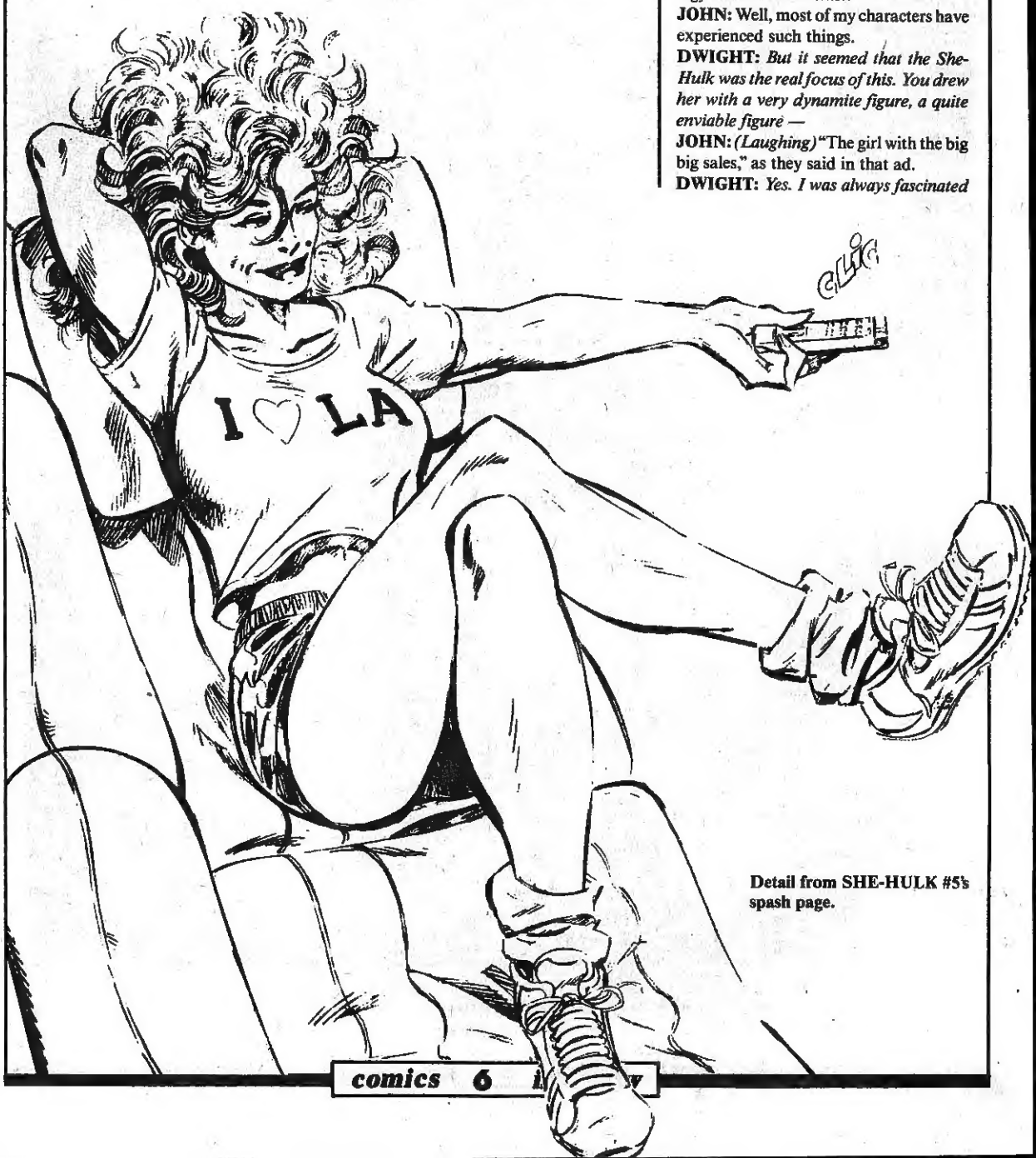
DWIGHT: *A-ha! That leads me to my next questions, considering the She-Hulk's sexuality.* (John laughs.) *You have run into some controversy with that. It seems that with the She-Hulk you've attempted to acknowledge without apology that sex does exist.*

JOHN: Well, most of my characters have experienced such things.

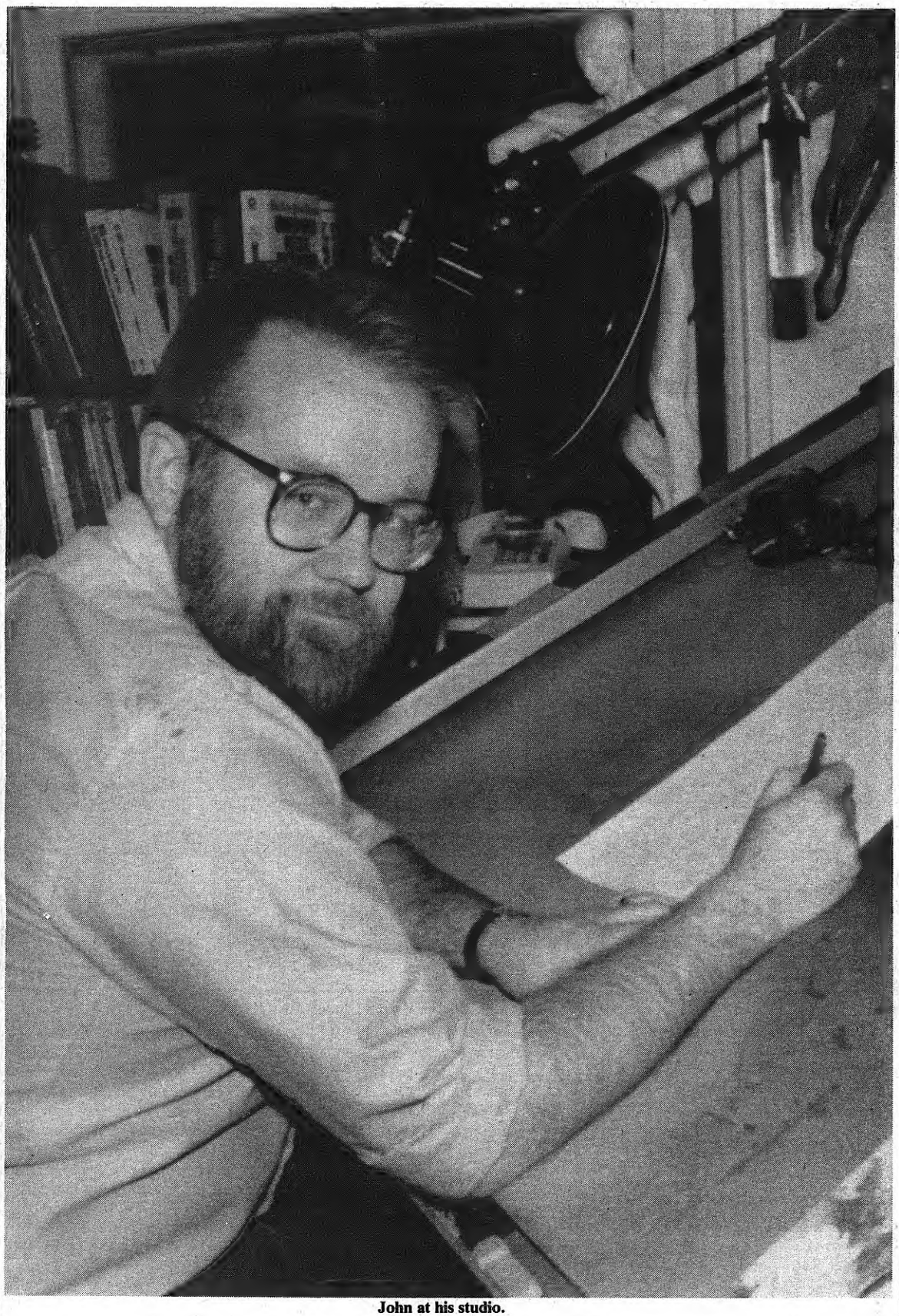
DWIGHT: *But it seemed that the She-Hulk was the real focus of this. You drew her with a very dynamite figure, a quite enviable figure —*

JOHN: *(Laughing)* "The girl with the big big sales," as they said in that ad.

DWIGHT: *Yes. I was always fascinated*



Detail from SHE-HULK #5's spash page.



John at his studio.

"I decided not to put her in costume . . . My way of

OHH, BABY! YOU ARE STILL THE BEST!
WELL, IT MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE, BEING IN LOVE.
BUT... YOU'RE SURE YOU'RE OKAY, BABE?
AFTER ALL THAT BUSINESS... TO FIND OUT YOU'RE STUCK AS SHE-HULK...
THAT'S REALLY NOT A PROBLEM, LOVER. I'VE ALWAYS PREFERRED BEING SHE-HULK.
BUT THERE IS SOME-THING.
'FESS UP, JEN. YOU KNOW YOU CAN'T KEEP SECRETS FROM ME.
THAT'S WHY I HARDLY CHANGE BACK TO MY NORMAL SELF.
WOULDN'T EVEN TRY WYATT. IT'S JUST... WELL, THERE'S ONE THING LEFT ABOUT THIS BUSINESS THAT STILL BUGS ME...
...PARDON THE PUN.
FROM WHAT SHIELD WAS ABLE TO DETERMINE THE COCKROACH CREATURE CAME ABOARD AS ONE OF THE CIVILIANS GRABBED ALONG WITH US, RIGHT?
YES. PROBABLY THE OLD BAG-MAN. WHY DOES THAT BOTHER YOU?

The censored panels from SHE-HULK Graphic Novel.

with your approach, her frankness about who she was, what she was, and that within the limits of the Code that you would have her living with Wyatt in an intimate relationship out of wedlock. That's a rather radical thing to have —

JOHN: So were Johnny and Alicia for awhile there; but I guess that was a little more subtle.

DWIGHT: *Your SHE-HULK graphic novel, your ending was slightly different than the one that saw print.*

JOHN: Yeah, the last page was redrawn. My original last page had She-Hulk and Wyatt in bed together. I *thought* that was okay since **Shooter** had done it in THE DAZZLER graphic novel, but **Shooter** said it *wasn't* okay. It was the "do as I say, not as I do" situation, so we ended up redrawing it. It had the same dialogue, essentially, but the pictures were different. I think the problem was that She-Hulk was obviously not being subjugated, which didn't fit with the psychology higher up. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *But poor Wyatt might have ended up crushed.*

JOHN: Yes, crushed to death, but he knows these old Indian tricks — *(Laughter.)* He has a magic totem.

DWIGHT: *Now that you have a woman as an editor, have you had any discussions on how to deal with the subject of She-Hulk's sexuality and her relationships with men?*

JOHN: No, not really. Bobbie trusts me I think . . . I *hope* Bobbie trusts me. She's aware of what I have done in the past, she was **Mike Carlin's** assistant editor on THE FANTASTIC FOUR for about three seconds, or while I was doing it for about three seconds, so she knows the way I work. She had expressed an interest in working with me again because she said she liked my stuff, so I

getting She-Hulk out of her clothes every issue."

think she knows that she can trust that I'm going to try and play this, as with all aspects of She-Hulk, anything. I think of the characters as being human beings, I try to have them *act* like human beings, and I think when somebody *looks* like She-Hulk, she's going to act in a certain way because society's not going to give her much choice. Really, here she is, it's not like she can *hide*, she's six seven and bright green. So she's very open and honest and straightforward about all the aspects of her life, except religion and politics which we don't get into. She's a Hasidic Jew and — *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *You're bringing back the Blonde Phantom, a character from the Golden Age.*

JOHN: Right.

DWIGHT: *A more obscure character we probably could find.*

JOHN: There's probably someone who was in one panel somewhere.

DWIGHT: *Why the Blonde Phantom?*

JOHN: That came about because I mentioned to **Jim Salicrup** that the pattern I was following on SHE-HULK was duplicating the early years of THE FANTASTIC FOUR and THE AVENGERS, where the second issue was an alien invasion, arbitrary guest star, and then in the fifth issue they fight Dr. Doom. And he said, "Which Golden Age character are you bringing back in the fourth issue?" The Sub-Mariner came back in the fourth issue of THE FANTASTIC FOUR, Captain America came back in the fourth issue of THE AVENGERS —and I hadn't even thought of that. So I called **Roger Stern**, who has encyclopedic knowledge, and I said, "Who was an obscure Golden Age character who hasn't been brought back yet?" He said he'd call me back, and about three seconds later he called me back and said, "The Blonde Phantom!" *(Laughter.)* It was funny because I actually remembered the Blonde Phantom, possibly because she was mentioned briefly in **Steranko's** HISTORY OF COMICS — she was actually cover featured on the back of the second volume.

So we decided to do her, since she was owned by Marvel, an old Timely character, and Roger dug up an old strip, a four-pager, in which she actually talked to the audience in one panel. I thought this was great, she's already got something in common with what I want to do in SHE-HULK, and we went from there. She turned out to be a lot of fun. She's now 65 years old. I introduce the gag that comic-book characters live forever *unless* they're out of the comics, then they age like real people — so she wants to get back into a regular comic before she dies. *(Laughter.)* She's figured this out, so here she is, she's 65 and she works in Blake Tower's office.

DWIGHT: *What sort of adventures will she be having?*

JOHN: She's essentially Viv to She-Hulk's Lucy. She will occasionally get involved actually in the story, as she does in the fourth issue where she's involved in helping to defeat the Stiltman. Then she'll be more or less like a background character. She works at the same place that She-Hulk does, so whenever we have a She-Hulk in the office story, Weezie, Louise Grant Nelson, will feature prominently. In issue #12 She-Hulk's going back to California to visit her dad for Christmas, and Weezie's going to go with her, and I'm planning to have sort of a romance develop between She-Hulk's father and her, since apparently She-Hulk's mother is dead.

DWIGHT: *Will you have a matchup between the She-Hulk and the Hulk?*

JOHN: Not if I can help it, no. I want to specifically avoid that simply because it's too obvious, too easy. If I could have Bruce Banner wander through a story, just to drive people crazy *waiting* for him to turn into the Hulk, much as he did in She-Hulk's first issue way back in the first series — Banner was in the first issue but the Hulk wasn't.

DWIGHT: *It would be neat if you did something like that, yeah. Okay, the She-Hulk back in court. There's a SOLO*

SHE-HULK costume sketch by John.

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"She-Hulk is going to keep getting herself messed up."

AVENGERS where she's in court — how would your treatment of her in court be different?

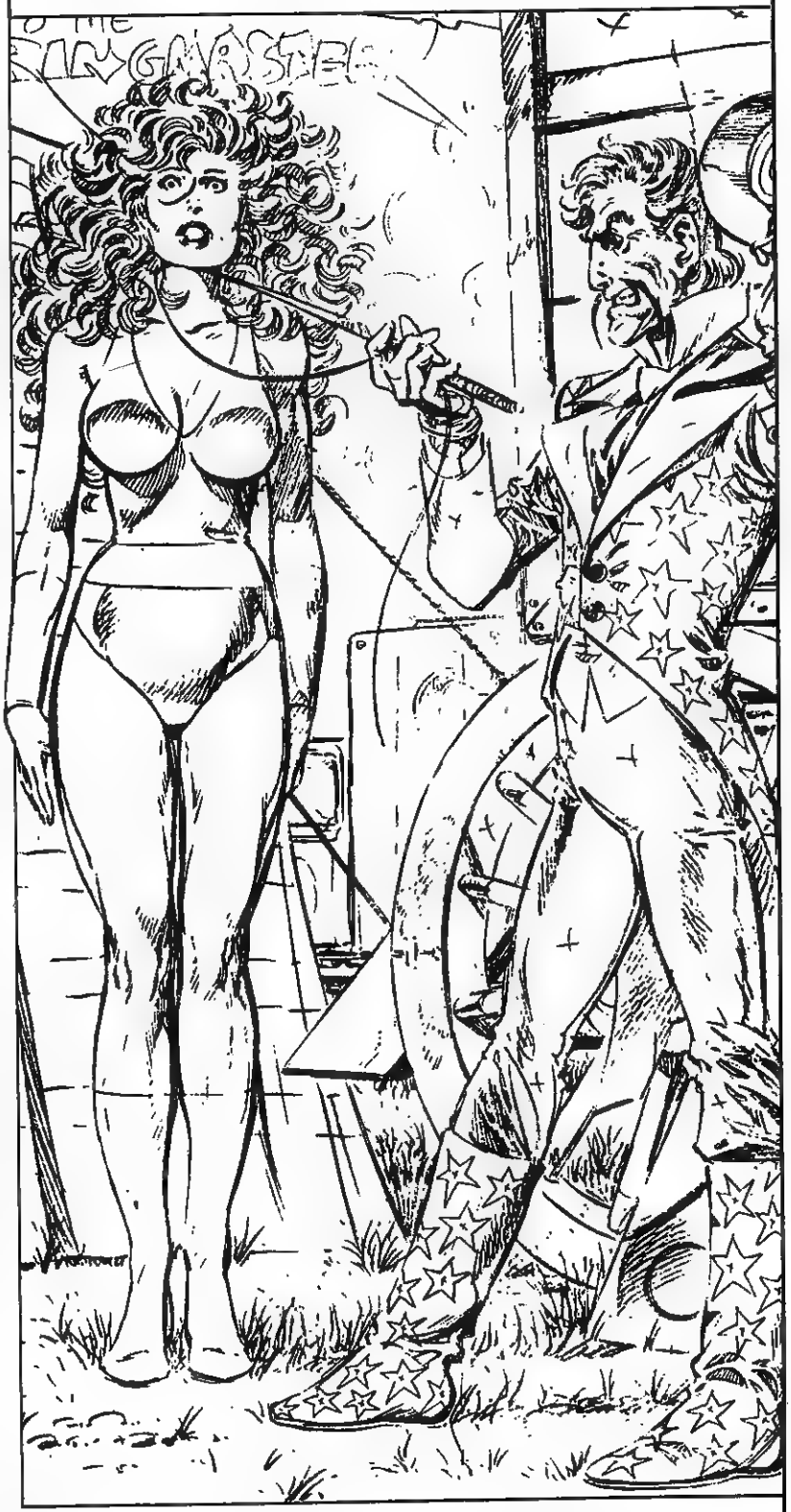
JOHN: Well, for one thing, in the one that Chris did she was still functioning as a defense attorney. She now works for the DA so she'll be a prosecutor, which makes a lot of difference. One of the things that's going to happen — I discussed this with **Bob Ingersoll,** who is my official legal advisor . . . I forget what the thing is actually called, but there's some agreement that lawyers operate under, that they will not handle a case they might be required to testify in. So She-Hulk is going to keep getting herself messed up; she's assigned to prosecute somebody, she goes out playing detective trying to track down stuff, ultimately ending up in a situation where she's as much a material witness in the case as she is the prosecutor.

So we're going to be having *two* kinds of cases she handles, the ones where she gets involved, where she *doesn't* get to play lawyer, and the ones where she *doesn't* get involved, where she *does* get to play lawyer. I have one scene I want to do where the splash page is the counsel for the defense standing at his table and saying, "Your Honor, I object, She-Hulk is intimidating the witness!" And on the second page we pull back to show She-Hulk talking to the witness in the witness box and she's sort of *casually* bending an iron girder. *(Laughter.)* Just silly stuff, goofy stuff. The law part is basically just to give her a source of income, it's not really something I view as a major source of stories. This isn't PERRY MASON. If it is then she's in trouble, the DA always loses on PERRY MASON. *(Laughter.)*

I'm writing her with two sources of income. A fashion designer is going to approach her to be a spokesperson for his line of big and tall women's clothing. *(Laughter.)* Not only will she get a small stipend out of that, she will also get a supply of clothes. Since I decided not to put her in costume, her clothes get trashed every issue. **Peter Sanderson** views this as my way of getting She-Hulk out of her clothes every issue, and I say I'm not doing JANE here, the old British strip — literal strip. But she has tended to lose her clothes a lot. *(Laughter.)* She doesn't in the fifth issue, just to throw everybody off.

DWIGHT: *She no longer has a costume of unstable molecules —*

JOHN: Actually in the fourth issue she strips down to a sort of a teddy, so that her suit won't get trashed, and it doesn't get a mark on it. At the end of the issue Weezie comes up and says, "You just punched through walls, through the floor, how come this isn't ripped to shreds?" And She-Hulk pulls the back



"Avengers are Avengers are Avengers."

and shows the label that says "Protected by the Comics Code." *(Laughter.)* That's one of the more off-the-wall bits.

DWIGHT: *Oh, by the way, I was talking with Bobbie Chase the other day and she said she regards #5 as her personal favorite.*

JOHN: Yeah, she liked #5 a lot, that's the one that gets the *most* crazy. I mean it gets crazier. It was unfortunate when **Terry Kavanagh** asked me to do the preview thing for MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS, because I was up to issue #3 then so I did it in sort of issue #3 mode. That little eight-pager is a lot crazier than the first issue. The first issue is quite *calm* because I told Tom and Mark that I was going to be very gentle with everybody and sort of lead them into it. In the first issue she breaks the fourth wall twice, very subtle, and the second issue is a little crazier. By the fifth issue she actually rips out the back of a panel in order to get to the next page, so we're getting good and crazy. Now I have to do even better than that so Bobbie will like it. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *Will the She-Hulk be appearing in either THE AVENGERS or THE WEST COAST AVENGERS?*

JOHN: Yes. The whole approach I'm taking with THE AVENGERS is that Captain America calls *everybody* who's ever been an Avenger, who's still alive or not in jail, and says, "Look, enough of this two groups/core groups stuff, Avengers are Avengers are Avengers, we're *all* the Avengers." And they all say, "That's a good idea, we'll come if you need us." So as a matter of fact She-Hulk is in both THE AVENGERS *and* THE WEST COAST AVENGERS in two separate storylines coming out at the same *time!*

The continuity is for the readers to figure out. What I will do is I will leave breaks, clear breaks, in the stories, so people will be able to say, "Oh, obviously Captain America went off here and did six issues of his own book and then came back for the next issue." You could go crazy trying to figure it out. "Can I use Thor this month? "Thor is off on a space quest in his own book this month." Well, I used to figure it out when I was eleven years old, I don't think the eleven-year-olds now are any *dumber* than I was. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *Now that Marvel has over 25 years of continuity, do you find it restrictive, or a hurdle that you have to cross?*

JOHN: No, I can say that quite flatly. Marvel's continuity has always been flexible. We're always able to do stories that say, "Hey, the last 20 years, nope, that was a lie, that was a mistake." In fact I'm just doing that with the Vision, throwing out the last fifteen years of the Vision's history and saying, "Sorry, we lied!" Actually *we* didn't lie, because that's never fair. I hate it when the writer lies. A villain was involved and the villain lied. So in that context Marvel's continuity is kind of carved in Silly Putty rather than in stone, it can be pushed around. This has always been the advantage of Marvel, this is why you'll never

"The omniscient narrator never lies."

see CRISIS ON MARVEL EARTH. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *INFINITE MARVEL EARTHS.* (Laughter.)

JOHN: Marvel does sort of little mini-bangs every once in awhile, rather than a big bang. I did it in THE FANTASTIC FOUR in the most casual way. I mean for all the outrage that people had about stuff that I was changing in THE FANTASTIC FOUR, *nobody* seemed to notice — at least nobody who wrote or who talked to me — that I had *completely* eliminated any references to World War II, I just didn't *mention* it anymore. I didn't say they *hadn't* been, I just didn't mention it. That's what you can do with Marvel. But so many of the *other* company's characters seem to be so tied into their origins and their backgrounds and whatnot that you almost can't *do* the character without saying, "Look how tied down he is, that's why we have to have two of them."

DWIGHT: *It almost seems to run in conflict with the sense of fantasy that comics are supposed to have.*

JOHN: Yeah. When I was doing Superman, for example, I got a lot of flak about the things I was changing and how I was messing with this 50 years of continuity. My answer to that was, "Well, if we've had 50 years of continuity then he doesn't fly, he doesn't have X-Ray vision, he was never Superboy, 'cause *none* of those things existed in the first years of the strip."

DWIGHT: *DC itself played fast and loose with the continuity.*

JOHN: Yeah, oh yeah. Superman himself didn't know he was from Krypton until like 1948, but then it became the most *important* thing in his *life!* Wonder Woman used to have an origin for her plane every six months, every time it was different. Marvel, while we've always been very faithful to our past, it's a logical kind of thing to say it's interpretive — we can use this part, we can ignore this part, we can always say these two panels back in 1964 were actually three panels and here's the third panel that you didn't see where the bad guy turned around and said, "Ha ha, they fell for it." As a matter of fact . . . not to name names — let's try that for this interview, I won't name names — but a writer who is writing a book that I once did, recently did a scene where he *lifted* a whole scene from one of *my* stories, and had the character saying what he didn't say. He changed the dialogue.

That's not right, you cannot do that. You can *add* dialogue, you can show us the scene before or the scene after if you want to change it, but you must *never* change what was actually there. It wasn't just a couple of words or a paraphrasing, he was saying something totally different, making a whole different point, and that's cheating. Then the writer *is* lying. It's okay for the characters to lie, but the

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"Hey, the last 20 years, nope, that was a lie, that was a mistake."

writer should never lie to the readers, otherwise they've got nothing to depend on. I always make sure that characters lie but the writers don't. The omniscient narrator never lies. If I make a major change, as I'm doing with the Vision, I go back and research it and look it all up. And I discovered that there was *already* stuff that contradicted the laid down story of the Vision, so the story of the Vision was *obviously* a lie.

DWIGHT: *With the Vision you're making a real radical move, literally you're taking him apart.*

JOHN: Yes, literally. That was fun, I've always wanted to do that.

DWIGHT: *What's in store for Wanda —*

JOHN: Oh, poor Wanda.

DWIGHT: *— now that she's effectively married to a stranger?*

JOHN: Yeah, she's got this guy that's programmed to know that he's her husband. Well, maybe I should go back a little bit and explain why I did what I did. I've always been bothered, first of all, by the idea of the Vision *marrying* the Scarlet Witch. In the issue that just came out I have one of the characters saying that her brother-in-law was very offended when he found out, he said it was like somebody marrying a toaster or a blender or something. Actually *I* was the brother-in-law, that was my first reaction. That was a signal issue of THE AVENGERS, you know — the Scarlet Witch marries a toaster and Mantis marries a tree. I don't know *what* we're saying in that issue, so I wanted to get rid of that, that had always sort of bothered me.

I'd also never liked the idea of the Vision being the original Human Torch, that seemed to come out of left field, especially when there were several stories *before* it that seemed to put the lie to it. Toro attended the Torch's funeral, for example, and then Ultron is supposed to have *found* the Torch where the Mad Thinker and the FF *left* him. So I decided . . . fifteen years ago it seems, when I first got into comics, I was going, "Can I do a story that puts the lie to that?" They kept saying, "No, you don't do THE AVENGERS." And then finally I *was* doing THE AVENGERS. My whole reason for doing WEST COAST when Howard asked me to do WEST COAST, I said, "If the Vision and the Scarlet Witch can become permanent members then I'll do the book." Wanda has always been a favorite character of mine.

"That was a signal issue of AVENGERS — Scarlet

And he said that was fine. **Mark Gruenwald's** eyes lit up at that point, he said, "Now you can do that story!" And I go, "Yeah, that's right, I can!" So we started working on it.

I don't know when this will be coming out, I don't know how much I want to give away . . . not that it really matters, the kids will buy the stuff anyway. We find out that the Vision is not the Human Torch. I am bringing back the original Human Torch, he will be with the West Coast Avengers for about a year. And poor Wanda is going to be going quite nuts, I plan a nervous breakdown for her. It's terrible to do these things to the characters. Terrible stuff is happening with the Vision, some terrible stuff is going to be happening with her kids — that's already started — and Wonder Man is now revealing that he's been in love with her all along. The premise there being that the Vision had Wonder Man's brain patterns, so if it was logical for the Vision to fall in love with Wanda, it *has* to have come from there. You don't program emotions into somebody, where did the Vision's emotions come from; they must have come from Simon's brain patterns.

So poor old Simon, he came out of whatever that was he was doing being dead for about nine years — real world time, three and a half minutes Marvel time — *(Laughter.)* He came out of being dead and here was this woman who was everything he had ever dreamed of, and she was married to a toaster. So he was holding himself back and being a gentleman about it, but now he's pursuing her. The twist there is that he has refused to let them put his brain patterns *back* into the Vision. He says, "The last time I was dead, this time I have a choice, I don't want somebody walking around with my head. I had adjusted to it, but I had adjusted to it sort of by force of not having any choice in the matter."

DWIGHT: *What a selfish guy.*

JOHN: Yeah, he is a selfish guy. So Wanda's ticked off at him. He's in love with her, she hates him, the Vision's off being strange, weird things are happening with her kids, and she has a nervous breakdown.

DWIGHT: *What's Pietro's role in all this?*

JOHN: Unfortunately there's a moratorium on the use of Quicksilver right now, I can't use him until the moratorium is up — although Howard has reminded people that by the time the books I'm working on now come out, the moratorium would be over. It has been one of the most frustrating things, actually, about doing Wanda, because I can't use two-thirds of her background. I can't use Quicksilver and I can't use Magneto. But *now* I can use Magneto, so that I'm sliding in. I'm not sure exactly what the sequence will be, but certainly *as* Wanda has her nervous breakdown, Magneto is going to be there to sort of stir the pot.

DWIGHT: *Yes, he's evil now.*

A computerized chorus line . . . creation of Byrne & his Macintosh Plus.

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Witch marries a toaster and Mantis marries a tree."

More computer-generated artwork from John & the Mac-Plus.

JOHN: Yes, he's a bad guy again! *Hooray!* And I helped!

DWIGHT: *Yes, you did the NEW MUTANTS story.*

JOHN: You bet I did. *(Laughter.)* I was right there. **Bob Harras** said, "Will you do this fill-in?" "I don't want to do NEW MUTANTS." "It's the one where Magneto goes bad again." "No problem, I'll find time.!" *(Laughter.)* So, we're going to do what I have very subtly referred to as my Dark Scarlet Witch story, where Magneto sort of re-recruits her. *That* came about because one of the first things that Howard asked me to do was redesign her costume. Now, I *like* Wanda's costume, I always have, so I was looking to sort of redesign it in a way that would keep all the elements that I like. I kept coming up with stuff that was *way* too modern and *way* too flashy, and I came up with one where I said, "This doesn't suit her personality at all, but this would be a great costume if she was bad again." And out of that came the Dark Scarlet Witch story.

DWIGHT: *So, Magneto's going to turn his daughter back again.*

JOHN: Well, he picks her up in the middle of her nervous breakdown, when she feels that all of her friends are against her. The Avengers are reacting almost too glibly to all of this. What I'm trying to explore here is this kind of unconscious thread running through the Avengers that yes, the Vision is their friend and their partner, but at heart they know he's just a robot. They know that if he gets his arm cut off, we build him another one. If he gets his memory erased, we reprogram him. The Vision as he is now is very much the Vision that he was when they first met him. So they're not really reacting to the fact that he is dead — even though Hank Pym has said for all intents and purposes he's dead. Wanda's going crazy because they're all being sort of matter of fact about it.

DWIGHT: *They're not married to him.*

JOHN: Right. And I want to get into the fact, too, that a lot of them have probably been uncomfortable with the relationship anyway. It *is* a little bit weird. It only happens in comic books — that was the headline I saw in the supermarket the other day, where some hacker wants to marry his computer. This guy's read one too many issues of THE AVENGERS. *(Laughter.)* But it's the same thing for Wanda. I don't know *what* she was supposed to be getting out of the relationship. I have an image of Wanda as being very sheltered. She's old world, middle European, her whole focus in life basically is you get married and you have lots of kids. Somehow she found herself being thrust into playing the super-hero game. That's one of the reasons I've always liked her old costume, in fact, is that it's always seemed to me a very demure kind of costume — even given the fact that it's skintight, she's always had a big pile of cape around her. It's sort of like a 1940s swimsuit she wears, it's not French cut, it doesn't have deep cleavage and all that. She *covers* as much of herself as she possibly can even though she's wearing a super-hero costume, it

"We're going to do n[illegible]ark Scarlet Witch story."

John's pencils from WOLVERINE #17.

sort of fits in with this demure personality I've always seen her as having.

DWIGHT: *Yeah, the only times she really ever asserted herself have been in traditional female roles, and there is that quality of her where she's managed to keep certain standards in spite of everything.*

JOHN: M-hm.

DWIGHT: *So this new role for her, which is actually the old role with Magneto . . . what sort of relationship are you going to have* now *between the two?*

JOHN: It's going to be very strange. I'm not entirely sure how I'm going to play it, but I *suspect* that it's going to be about as close to incestuous as I can get without revolting myself and the Comics Code. We have established that Wanda is a ringer for Magneto's dead wife — or whether she's dead or not, she wandered off into the snow and you never saw the body. Wanda is going to be much more assertive, stronger in an uncharacteristic way, while she's busy having her nervous breakdown. So the relationship will be odd. It'll not be the one we've seen before because neither of the characters will *be* the characters that we've seen before. Magneto is different, Wanda will certainly be different, so it'll basically be one of those things that won't *literally* turn into Dark Phoenix and get away from us and end up where, "Oh, no, now I have to kill Wanda! Now she has to go to the moon and blow up!" *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *And then we discover that it wasn't her.*

JOHN: It wasn't her, yeah. Wanda has been in a cocoon at the bottom of Jamaica Bay since when.

DWIGHT: *What was your impression when you heard that Phoenix was not Jean Grey?*

JOHN: Part of that was my idea.

DWIGHT: *Oh, that's right.*

JOHN: It had begun, as I understand it, with **Kurt Busiek**. I had always thought I came up with it, but **Roger Stern** insists that it was **Kurt Busiek's** idea, and Roger has a better memory than I do. So, I thought it was a *great* idea. I *never* cared for the Phoenix character, and I *never* cared for the fact that she had to die. That was one of the *earliest* manifestations of the later problems with certain people who are no longer with Marvel — tall people. *(Laughter.)* So I was pleased that it turned out Phoenix wasn't Jean Grey.

I really don't know, in all honesty, *how* she was brought back. Out of, again, the problems with certain people who are no longer with us, that issue was redrawn and rewritten several times, so I refused to read the final version. The story was approved *every* step of the way, then at the last minute we got funny with it. In its original form it worked perfectly, it tied into everything that Chris had set up, consciously or unconsciously. What ultimately happened with it I don't know, but I'm glad Jean is back, in whatever form. At least it gives us a Jean Grey who can always be manipulated *into* the Jean Grey we want her to be. I've always had this thing about redheads. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *Well, we've talked a lot about Wanda and the Vision; I'd like to talk about the other Avengers. There are so many —*

JOHN: There's millions of 'em. I made

"It's going to be about as close to incestuous as I can get."

Paul Ryan draw everybody in the first issue we did, I should go grab the artwork.

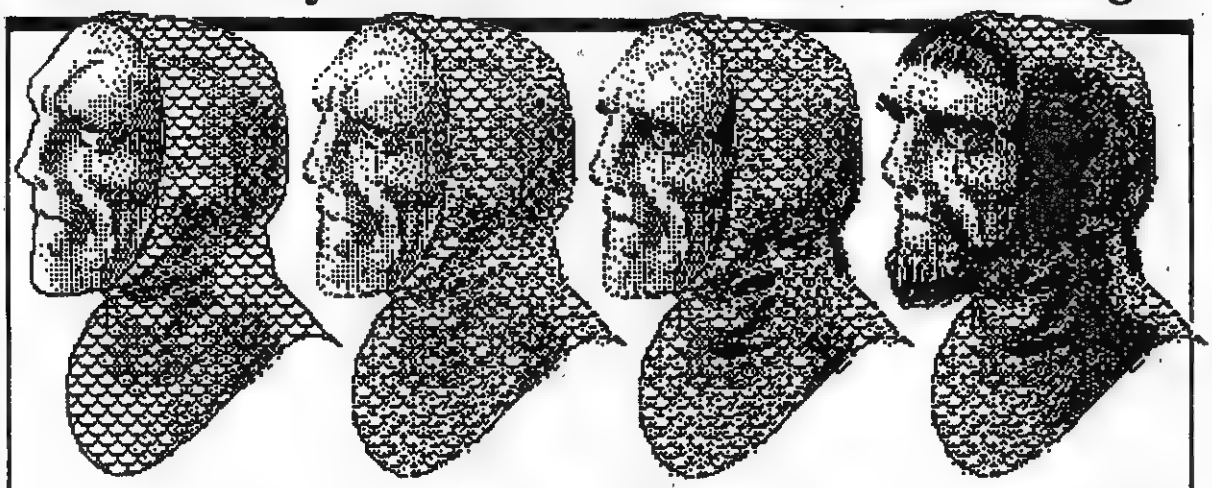
DWIGHT: *Well, what are your plans for the various Avengers?*

JOHN: Well, sort of the hook into the book, the approach to the book, is that I'm dealing with these guys as the costumed characters rather than as the secret identities. As far as I'm concerned you will probably never see Steve Rogers in THE AVENGERS, you will probably never see Tony Stark in THE WEST COAST AVENGERS.

DWIGHT: *Of course they have their own books.*

JOHN: They have their own books so you don't need to, that is exactly my point. For me it's much *easier* to just say here's Iron Man, here's Captain America, they interact thus, and I don't have to

"The old days when I used to do seven or eight



Above: Mac-Plus artwork. Below: Sub-Mariner, from the sketchbook of Byrne.

worry whether Steve is having romantic problems in CAPTAIN AMERICA this month, or whatever. So with each character it's going to be how they work with the rest of the group, that will be more important than what they're doing in their own lives. I told Howard that what I will probably do in my script, since Howard is editor on several of the books, I'll occasionally put "insert topical comment here." Then Howard can insert something like, "This reminds me of my fight with Foam-Man in my last issue." so there will be that sense that this is the same character, but for the most part it's the interplay that's important, not who they are individually.

DWIGHT: *How are you coming to grips with the development of individual characters, making sure they're not lost in the shuffle?*

JOHN: Well, actually — this is going to sound very glib — I'm not worrying too much about that. Because there *are* so many characters and because I'm essentially going to be playing the Avengers as wall to wall super-heroes, everybody will get their chance to shine. I'm not going to worry about, "Well, it's been three issues since Captain America has shone." He'll shine sooner or later, right now I'm focussing on this guy. It's going to jump around. People think of group books as having a lot of characters — that's the first thing people will say, "How can you draw this group book, it's got so many characters in it?" But it's pretty much the same as SPIDER-MAN. In SPIDER-MAN you've got Spider-Man, Mary Jane, Jonah, Aunt May, Robbie Robertson — there is a *cast*, there are a dozen characters in SPIDER-MAN. In THE AVENGERS there are a dozen characters, it just happens that they're all wearing costumes. In SPIDER-MAN you have the super-hero and his friends who are not super-heroes, in a group you've got a bunch of super-heroes and their friends who are super-heroes and *their* friends who are super-heroes. You have to go down several steps before you run into people who *aren't* super-heroes, or super-villains. It's manipulating the same *number* of characters, the only difference is they are a little more dynamic, they bounce off buildings. *(Laughter.)*

panels a page are a long way behind us now."

DWIGHT: *What's going to happen to Jarvis?*
JOHN: Jarvis continues as is. I'm going to be moving the mansion back to Central Park East and setting up these hydraulic injection tubes that will carry the Avengers out to the island, which will not be simply a launch base for their quinjets and whatnot. But Jarvis runs the mansion, he's in charge of the mansion. He has a brief appearance in the first issue that Paul drew for me — with his patch. I wasn't aware he had a patch these days, I gotta catch up on these things. I don't think he'll be trying to defeat the Avengers because his mother needs an operation again. *(Laughter.)*
DWIGHT: *That old story.*
JOHN: That stuff, yeah. "Well, my mother needed an operation." "Oh, okay Jarvis, we understand."
DWIGHT: *"So I became a super-villain."*
JOHN: Yeah. Logic, logic. My approach to all such stories is just to say, "Would you do this in the real world?" You know, if your mother needed —
DWIGHT: *Some strange things have happened, though.*
JOHN: I suppose. I try to put everything into some kind of a context that fits it into the real world. I say let's not have this person acting this way simply because he's a super-hero or a whatever, let's ask how he would react if he was a plumber or something. If it works in *that* context, then it works. Otherwise maybe we should avoid it.

Above & below: More pencils from John's 1st (new) WOLVERINE (#17).

DWIGHT: *THE AVENGERS is being drawn by Paul Ryan.*
JOHN: Yes, he's doing a beautiful job.
DWIGHT: *As an artist, how do you find yourself working with another artist?*
JOHN: Well, getting back into stuff I've probably said in other interviews, one of the first things is that for *most* of my life I have thought of myself — for most of my awareness of what I want to do when I grow up kind of life — I've thought of myself as a writer who draws, not an artist who writes. My artistic skills were obviously the most easy to demonstrate, so I got into comics that way. But I've always been coming up with stories, did a

"I came home and said, 'Boy, look at all this money."

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The oblong-box (above) says it all: Byrne, Ryan & Palmer (AVENGERS #306).

lot of the plotting on the last two years of THE X-MEN, and that sort of stuff. So working with other artists is not a problem, I simply put on my artist hat when I'm thinking of the plots and write something that I would like to draw. Paul commented that he was delighted with the first plot because he was able to do big pictures — "This reads like a **John Byrne** plot!" *(Laughter.)* I do four or five panels a page, so I write four or five panels a page. The old days when I used to do seven or eight panels a page are a *long* way behind us now.

DWIGHT: *That is one thing, now that you mention it, that I enjoyed about your Superman stories — that given the fact that we're dealing with a rather small-size product, the illustrations were big.*

JOHN: M-hm.

DWIGHT: *You would have small panels for variation, but for the most part we would have these really big full-page things, half-page. It was nice to see you do that because it's so rarely done in comics.*

JOHN: Yeah, people don't do it anymore. The syndrome these days seems to be more and more panels per page —

DWIGHT: *Following George Perez.*

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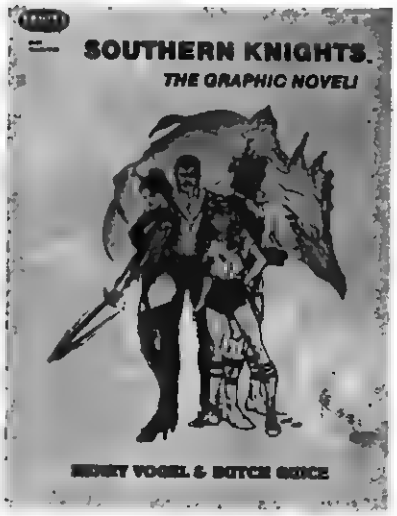

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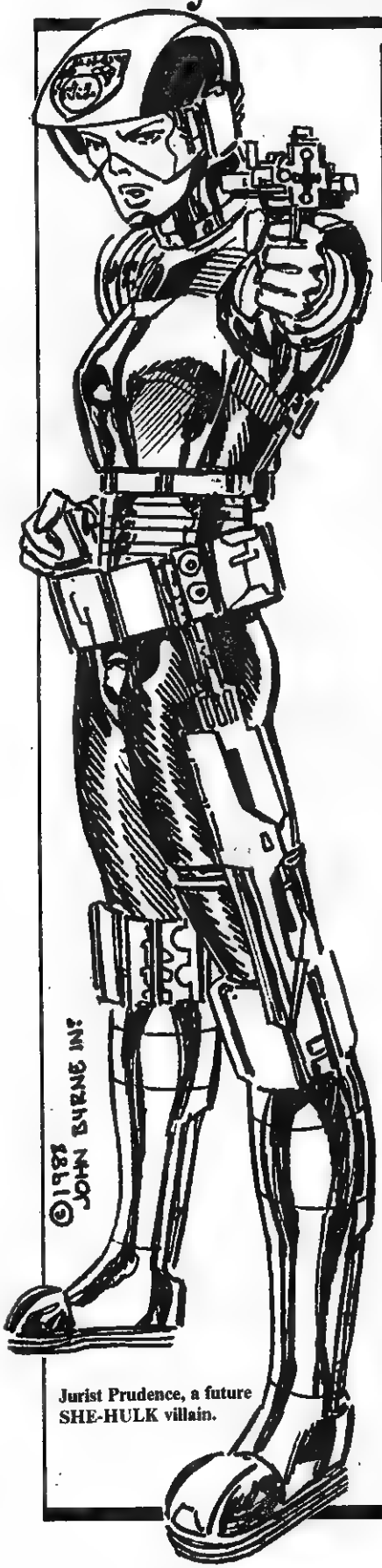
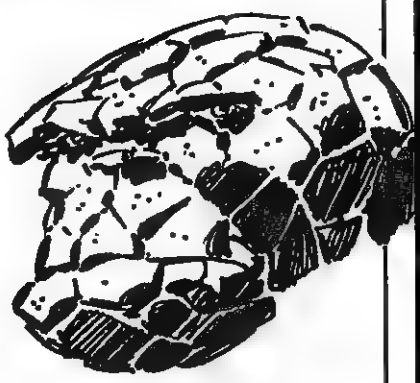


Jurist Prudence, a future SHE-HULK villain.



From the sketchbook of John Byrne (what's that Thang on the right?).

JOHN: Poor **George Perez,** he's crazy. *(Laughter.)* What amazes me about George is that he *does* that stuff and he seems to do it *fast!* You know, here's George, he sits down, "Well, I think I'll do a 53-panel page now." — *BANG!* and there it is!

DWIGHT: *And it's detailed.*

JOHN: Every single panel has 57 million lines in it. I don't do that anymore. *(Laughter.)* One of the things that has happened, of course, is that working as a writer-artist I've developed an economy. I realized that if you pick the *right* shot, you don't need three shots. And I've also come to the realization . . . one of the sort of *primary* mistakes that I've found that people make, writer-artists particularly, is conversations tend to be broken down into one character speaks in the first panel, another character speaks in the second panel, the first character speaks again in the third panel. I always look at it and say that's one panel, that's just the placement of the balloons. And out of that I started to realize how much *more* can be compressed into it.

Howard Mackie commented that they used a disproportionate amount of my stuff for pickup shots in MARVEL UNIVERSE because I tended to be the one who would show the event and the result in the same panel. Where Artist A would draw Cyclops firing his beam in one panel and in the second panel the bad guy getting hit by the beam, I would do both all in one shot. When you do that you start to diminish the number of panels. You don't diminish the amount of *detail* per se, there are probably just as many lines on a **Byrne** page as there are on a **Perez** page, it's just that I put them into big pictures.

DWIGHT: *What writers would you like to be the artist for?*

JOHN: Hm, that's hard to say. I haven't done it for awhile. I had a lot of fun working on that NEW MUTANTS with **Weezie Simonson,** but I don't know whether that would be something that would work on a regular basis. Every once in awhile I think about giving up the writing, because I can draw faster — you know, if you're not having to make up the words as you go along, the pictures come out quicker, especially since somebody else has already thought it out for you. But these days I'm almost leaning more toward writing instead of drawing, so the question for me is more who would I like to write for.

DWIGHT: *You've worked with a lot of editors.*

JOHN: Yeah, most of them on THE FANTASTIC FOUR. *(Laughter.)* The editor of the month.

DWIGHT: *Has there been any particular editor who's had the most influence over your work?*

JOHN: Influence, hm. That's interesting. *(Pause.)* That would be hard to pin down, because it was more working with different writers that had the greatest influence on me. Whether *they* were being affected by the editors, I don't know, because by the time I began really dealing with the editors directly as a writer-artist, I'd reached a point in my career where they were hiring me because they wanted a specific package. It wasn't, "I can take John and shape him into what I want." It was, "I can hire **John Byrne,** I know *exactly* what I will get." That was why Howard wanted me on WEST COAST AVENGERS, because he knew *exactly* what he'd get. The same is true with virtually everything I've done for the last eight years. So it would be hard to pick a specific editor who's had an effect.

giving up writing, I can draw faster."

DWIGHT: *What do you think is an editor's most valuable contribution?*

JOHN: Wow. I think editors are super-proofreaders. Their job is to make sure that the final packet makes sense. The proofreader's job is to make sure that it's spelled correctly, the super-proofreader's job is to make sure that it makes sense.

DWIGHT: *In the sense of?*

JOHN: In the sense of continuity, in the sense of page 22 somehow relates to page 1. The way I work, which these days is that I don't turn in a written plot or anything like that, it's kind of an ongoing thing where I call up the editor and say, "I'm on page 10, I think it's going to go in this direction, is that okay?" If it's something really outrageous then I'll call up the editor and say, "Okay, I'm on page 10 and I want to have the Scarlet Witch's head fall off, do you think that's okay?" Then Howard will go, "Oh, I don't know."

DWIGHT: *But you did slice off the She-Hulk's head.*

JOHN: But then I'm a crazy guy. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *What possessed you, John?*

JOHN: Well, it's one of those why not things; mostly it was because **DeFalco** said I couldn't do it. *(Laughter.)* A lot of my best stories have been born because somebody hands me a rule and says don't do this, so the first thing I do is look for the way to do it but still within the rule. It was really just **DeFalco** saying don't get too crazy, so naturally it's become crazier every step of the way. *(Laughter.)* So far he likes it, but he hasn't seen issue #5 yet.

DWIGHT: *Do you plan further satirical*

Doodles from Byrne's sketchbook.

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"Poor George Perez, he's crazy." (Laughter)

shots at conventions in comics?

JOHN: Yeah, to some extent. I'm dancing a very fine line on SHE-HULK because I *don't* want to really start poking fun at the medium, which is too easy. That's what a lot of people do. When I did the Superbman versus the Fantastical Four thing for WHAT THE, **Maggie Thompson** called me up and said, "I hear you're doing this thing that's poking fun at Superman and the Fantastic Four." I said, "No, I'm not poking fun at them, I'm poking fun at the way I have done them." It's very important to me that we never actually ridicule the characters, and therefore there's a lot of the conventions that we can't ridicule. It becomes a dead-end street if you start ridiculing the conventions.

An example that works from a different medium, there was an early episode of MURDER, SHE WROTE — in fact, the only episode I ever watched — where the opening scene is a person being chased across a baseball diamond by a car. By the end of the episode Jessica has figured out that the person driving and the person running were in cahoots, because there's really *no* way you can outrun a car, you have maybe three steps before you're smeared all over the sidewalk. I thought that was a funny thing to do on a TV show where people are *constantly* outrunning cars. Ever since I saw that show, I can't *watch* a TV show where people outrun cars. One of the scenes in THE TERMINATOR, one of my favorite movies, is a scene where they're running away from this truck — and they're running *downhill*, so the truck has got an advantage — and they're outpacing the truck. And I knew this was a Hollywood convention. Once you draw attention to it, you're in trouble. The same is true with a lot of the conventions in comics. I mean anybody with half a brain would know that Clark Kent is Superman, but the convention is that we don't.

DWIGHT: *I liked what Walt Simonson did in that respect in THOR.*

JOHN: Yes!

DWIGHT: *Sigurd Jorälson puts on the glasses and sees Clark Kent. (Laughter.)*

JOHN: It's one of those things, especially in so many of the comics that we do on a regular basis, where not only does this guy wear the *flimsiest* of disguises, but hangs out with the same people! Clark Kent and Superman both hang out with Lois Lane and Jimmy Olsen and Perry White! If I was Superman I'd be Clark Kent in Metropolis and Superman everywhere else, and nobody would associate Superman with Metropolis because he would never be there.

DWIGHT: *What would have happened between Superman and Lois if you had stayed on the book longer?*

JOHN: I was playing the whole thing pretty much on a day to day basis, I was never entirely sure where I was going to take it. That's generally the way I play the real world stuff in *all* my books. I try to keep it just so loose that the stuff surprises even me, if you can imagine such a thing. So I couldn't tell you exactly what I was going to do, especially since . . .

A funny thing that has happened to me is in the last five or six years, when I leave a book I tend to *forget* that I ever even did it. I discovered this awhile ago when I was flipping through my run on ALPHA FLIGHT, I couldn't remember any of them. I was going through page after page going, "I don't remember drawing any of this!" *(Laughter.)* The same thing sort of happened with SUPERMAN. I left the book and I just went *blank* altogether on it. I might have done something with it, but I hadn't thought about it since.

DWIGHT: *When you took over Superman many things were happening to you, good and bad. Your relationship with Marvel, with key individuals, was deteriorating rapidly. At the same time you were getting all sorts of media attention and acclaim —*

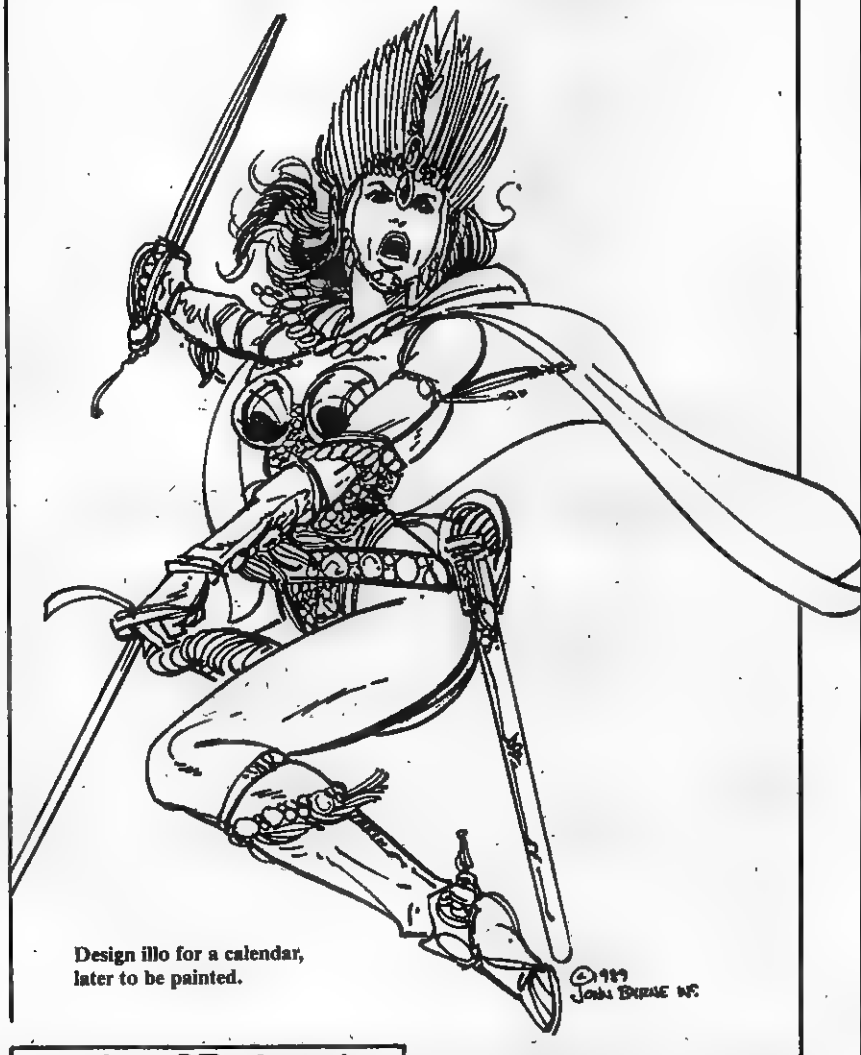
JOHN: More like infamy.

DWIGHT: *But suddenly there's John Byrne in news magazines and on TV.*

JOHN: On the TODAY SHOW! It's funny, they didn't call me when they heard I was going to do WEST COAST AVENGERS. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *What sort of impact did all this have on you?*

JOHN: None. *(Laughter.)* It's all so



Design illo for a calendar, later to be painted.

"American comics began as juvenile

phony, that was my 15 minutes of fame, as **Andy Warhol** assured us all we would have. I never for a moment expected it to last. I went to Superman with a *clear* impression in my mind that anything I did would last precisely as long as I was doing it, that whoever came along next, the first thing they would say would be, "I'll fix all that stuff that **Byrne** did wrong." So while the media attention was fun, because I can still raise eyebrows when I say I was on the TODAY SHOW or I was quoted in US magazine or I did the cover of TIME — I hated that TIME cover — I never for a minute expected it to last.

Something that put me in that frame of reference was I did a job for Dancer-Fitzgerald, a big advertising company in New York, about four years ago, and they paid me all *kinds* of *money* for what was essentially two pages of comic-book art. I came home after and said, "Boy, look at all this *money!* If I could do *this* every week . . ." And the logic went, "But you wouldn't, you'd do this maybe twice a year." So I go crazy every once in awhile and then reality comes crashing back in on me. The same thing happened with the *fame*, except luckily the reality crashed in much sooner, so I didn't really go crazy with it. I just said, "Wow, this is really neat, I'm getting all this attention — but it won't last and it doesn't matter."

Ultimately, this is one of the sad things about comics, it doesn't matter. Anything I do, anything **Frank Miller** does, anything **George Perez** does, anything **Alan Moore** does, the real world doesn't care. That keeps you sane, that keeps you humble. That's why every article about comic books ever written begins "ZAP BAM POW!" That's why every five years like *clockwork* somebody somewhere writes an article and says comics aren't just for kids anymore.

DWIGHT: *And the value of comics.*

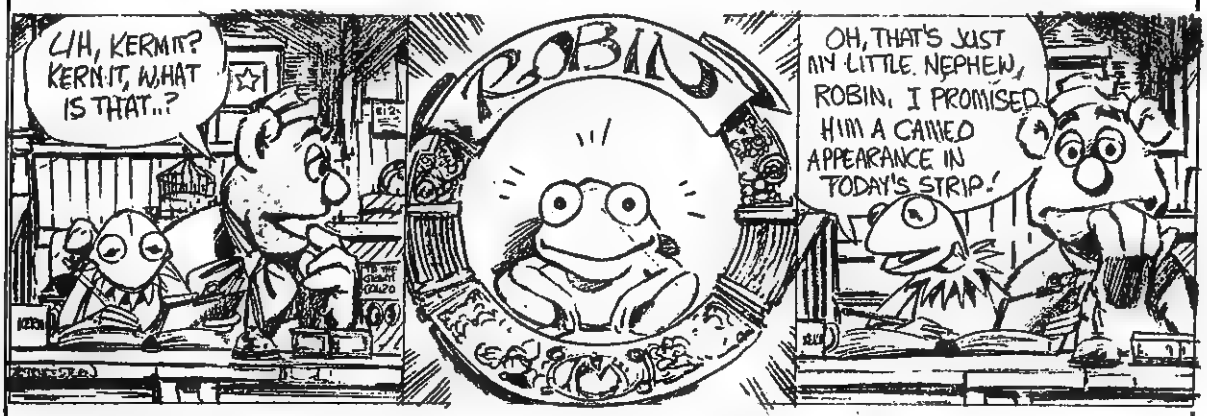
JOHN: And that's *all* they think of. You read an article about comics — ZAP BAM POW, SUPERMAN #1 is worth $20,000.

DWIGHT: *Why do you hate the TIME cover?*

JOHN: Because I didn't write the copy for it. I wrote a balloon, a suggestion of what he would say, so that it would actually lead into the two-page spread that was inside, and then *they* wrote copy that was, I thought, weak and *terribly* lettered. This is when you see what the real power of comic books is, is we have people who know what they're doing. I mean Superman referring to his supernatural powers? He doesn't *have* supernatural powers, guys, he's got super*human* powers — there's a world of difference. But the real world doesn't care. Also, the TIME article was that it was in the "Entertainment" section, it wasn't in the "Publishing" section where I thought it should be. The least they could have done was to have done it as an article about publishing. But it wasn't, it was "Entertainment" and it had pictures from the movies and pictures from the TV show and, "Oh, by the way, it's a comic book."

DWIGHT: *That seems to be a company attitude not exclusive to DC, that comics are simply the vehicle for the much more lucrative licensing.*

JOHN: Sure, and the real world doesn't care about comics. I'm going to keep saying that, I know. Talk to anyone of our generation, to stretch it, and older, 99% of them think that comics went away when they stopped reading them, *if*


UH, KERMIT? KERMIT, WHAT IS THAT..?
ROBIN
OH, THAT'S JUST MY LITTLE NEPHEW, ROBIN. I PROMISED HIM A CAMEO APPEARANCE IN TODAY'S STRIP!

© 1989 Jim Henson Prods.

Above: John's pencils for a Muppet comic strip. Below: A finished strip, with inks by "X" X-Men co-teamer, Terry Austin (Roger Stern did the words).

fiction. Juvenile fiction is fine."

O'CONNELL? AFRAID THAT NAME DOESN'T RING ANY BELLS- BUT I'VE HEARD OF YOU BIG GUY.
YOU'RE THE KICK-ASS TRUCKER - SUPER-HERO WHO GOT MIXED UP WITH SPIDER-MAN & SUBTLE BACK. ARE YOU CLOSING THESE HUCKSTERS, TOO-
GRUH! WELL, TOO
THESE JERKS
WHA?
DON'T RECKON YOU GIVE TO TOTE THE FUZZ.
DOES IT SOUND LIKE I'M GONNA HAVE TO KILL HIM AND THEM AND YOU, TOO?

John's pencils from Marvel's SHE-HULK #6.

indeed — as is becoming a larger group that I hate — if indeed they ever read them at all. There's more and more people, I'm finding, who didn't grow up reading comics, as I did. But when I was doing Superman, which was *the* most instantly recognizable character I've ever done, obviously, I'd have people say, "You do comics, what do you do?" I'd say Superman and there'd be two reactions, "Wow!" or "Oh, are they still doing that — I stopped reading that when I was eight." The real world has no idea. I don't know whether that's good or bad.

DWIGHT: *Well, having been over to Europe, it's certainly an eye-opener to see the contrast between the American attitude and the European attitude.*

JOHN: It's true, but the Europeans also do a whole different kid of comic, too.

DWIGHT: *Different formats, yeah —*

JOHN: Different formats, a different approach — they're not doing what *we* do. They're doing pictures that have word balloons in them, but —

DWIGHT: *Well, they've adapted it to their culture.*

JOHN: Yeah, it's a cultural thing. I think the biggest problem that American comics have always had is that they *began* as being perceived as juvenile fiction. Juvenile fiction is *fine* — juvenile fiction to me means TOM SWIFT and NANCY DREW. And if that's the niche we occupy then that's just fine by me. But in the late '40s and '50s they began to be perceived as *dumb* juvenile fiction, so it wasn't just that they were for kids, they were for *stupid* kids. That was unfortunate, that damaged us, and that's left us with a legacy that we're still having to live with.

DWIGHT: *Wertham did his share.*

JOHN: Good old **Wertham.** Of course the single *greatest* damage that has ever been done to the industry as a whole was done by the BATMAN TV series. It's been 25 years and we're *still* laboring under that yoke. That's why it's still ZAP BAM POW.

DWIGHT: *In MARVEL AGE Mark Gruenwald mentioned the fact that you're not planning to create any new villains for any of the books you're doing.*

JOHN: Probably not, I haven't made myself a rule. I've suggested that it *be* a rule for the whole company. Mark evidently handed down a rule of no new aliens, because we've got 65 billion different alien races out there. I say let's do the same thing with existing characters. You look through MARVEL UNIVERSE and there are *hundreds* and *hundreds* of characters, and so *many* of them do the same thing that somebody else does. I think what happened was we went through a period of just creative laziness where it was easier to come up with a new character than to try and figure out if there was already somebody who did it. I'm guilty of that myself. If you look at ALPHA FLIGHT, I mean certainly I was *told* to create a bunch of these guys, but I didn't fall all over myself trying to come up with original powers. Snowbird was probably the closest to being powers that nobody else had, simply because she was a *mystical* shapechanger and we didn't have any *mystical* shapechangers, we only had ordinary everyday shapechangers.

But yeah, what I said to Mark was that I felt, especially having MARVEL UNI-

"We went through a period of creative laziness."

VERSE as a reference, that there's absolutely no reason for us to create new characters. We have a storehouse of in many cases *lame* characters who either have good names, good powers, or both, but who have just been done badly. So if somebody wants a guy who throws electric zaps and travels down telephone wires, we'll say, "*This* guy does that, use him." And there's no reason not to redesign costumes, beef up powers, beef up backgrounds. The whole thing — getting back to what Stan and Jack used to do, there were no lame characters. There were some pretty lame concepts, but the way Jack would draw them, these guys would be punching down walls and doing all that kind of stuff. The genesis of my idea that there really are no lame characters if they're done right was when **Chris Claremont** was always saying that the Sentinels were lame, they were wimpy. I think I mentioned this the last time I did COMICS INTERVIEW. And I said, "No, they're not, let *me* plot a story." And I plotted the story where the Sentinels kill everybody and take over the world. It's all in the wrist, it's all in how you play it.

DWIGHT: *This brings to mind the Wrecker in THOR. All he is is this bank robber who has a crowbar, which on the surface of it is a rather lame thing, but the way Stan and Jack would produce it —*

JOHN: The Wrecker is a good example. In his first appearance he was tearing down buildings and went up against Thor all by himself. Later on he inherits these three other guys, and all of a sudden it takes all four of them to go up against Thor.

DWIGHT: *It should be added, for people who may be unaware, he was given mystical powers.*

JOHN: He's a *mystical* bank robber with a crowbar. *(Laughter.)* But what I'm saying is that he had a set of powers that enabled him to do all of this stuff all by himself, but over the years he ends up needing the Wrecking Crew in order to accomplish what he did all by himself the first time we saw him. This is what happens to these guys.

DWIGHT: *Well hey, Marvel at first was just this dinky office, and as things grew you needed more people and more things to do the same.*

JOHN: It's true, it's true, it's very representative of the real world. But my reaction when I look at something like that is to ask what would happen if. Obviously you'd be in big trouble if you played the Wrecking Crew at the same power level that the Wrecker used to have; Manhattan would be *levelled* if they all were operating at the power level that the Wrecker *alone* used to operate on.

DWIGHT: *Landlords would love it.*

JOHN: Landlords would love it, yeah — something more for Damage Control to do. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *Speaking of that, what's your impression of DAMAGE CONTROL?*

JOHN: I'm going to reserve judgment until I've seen it.

DWIGHT: *Yes, as we speak the first issue has yet to hit the stands.*

JOHN: And I wait for my freebies on everything, so I never see anything until a month after it's been on the stands. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *Yes, that's one of the more frustrating parts of the business. Now, you created ALPHA FLIGHT, do you check in on it every so often?*

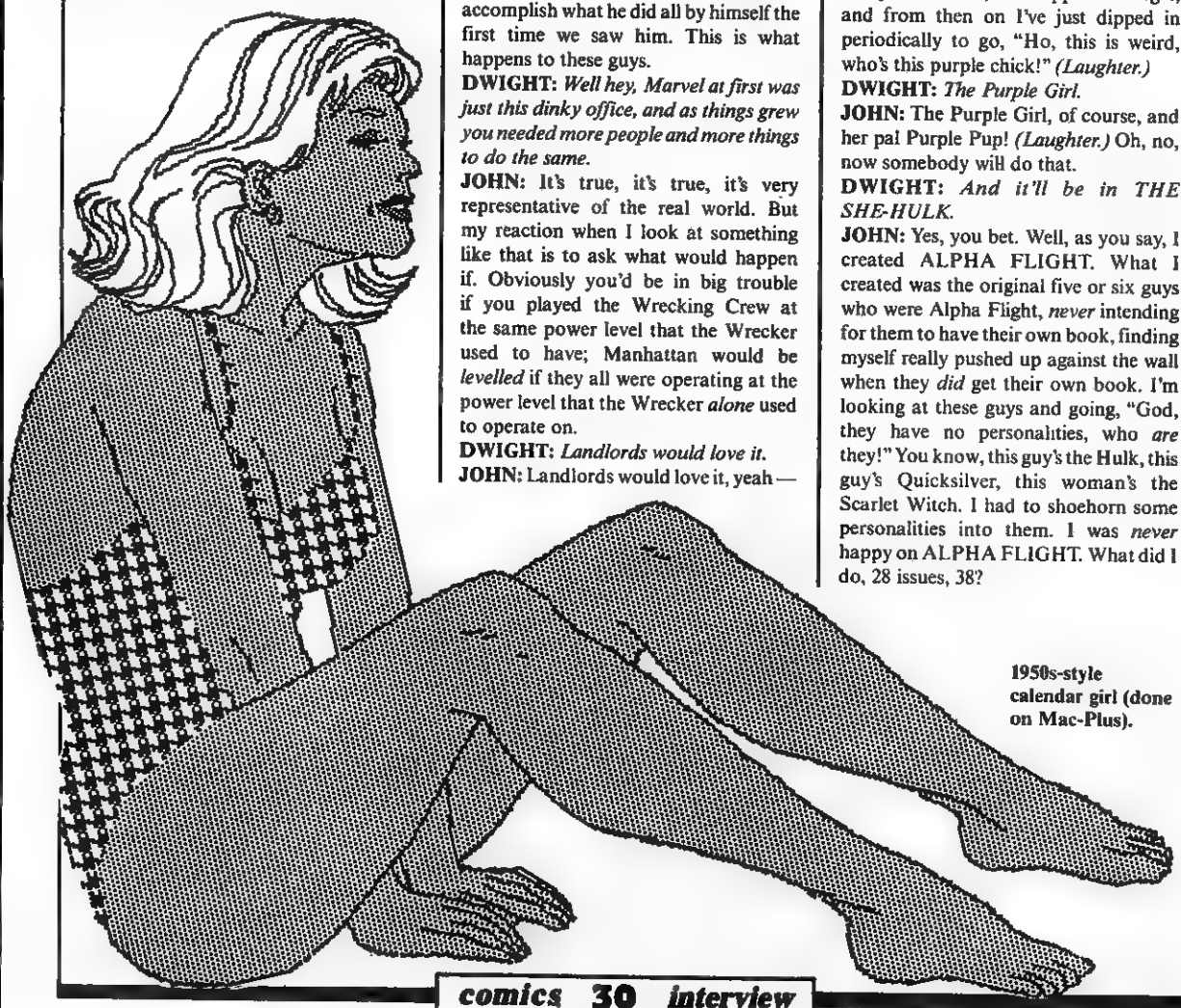
JOHN: I look in every once in awhile. I've lost touch, I don't know who half of these people are. I *officially* stopped reading it when Bill did the origin of Puck. I read that and I said, "That's a neat story, it's *not* Puck." It's not *my* Puck, I should say. He took it in a direction that *seemed* neat but that didn't really interest me, so I stopped reading it, and from then on I've just dipped in periodically to go, "Ho, this is weird, who's this purple chick!" *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *The Purple Girl.*

JOHN: The Purple Girl, of course, and her pal Purple Pup! *(Laughter.)* Oh, no, now somebody will do that.

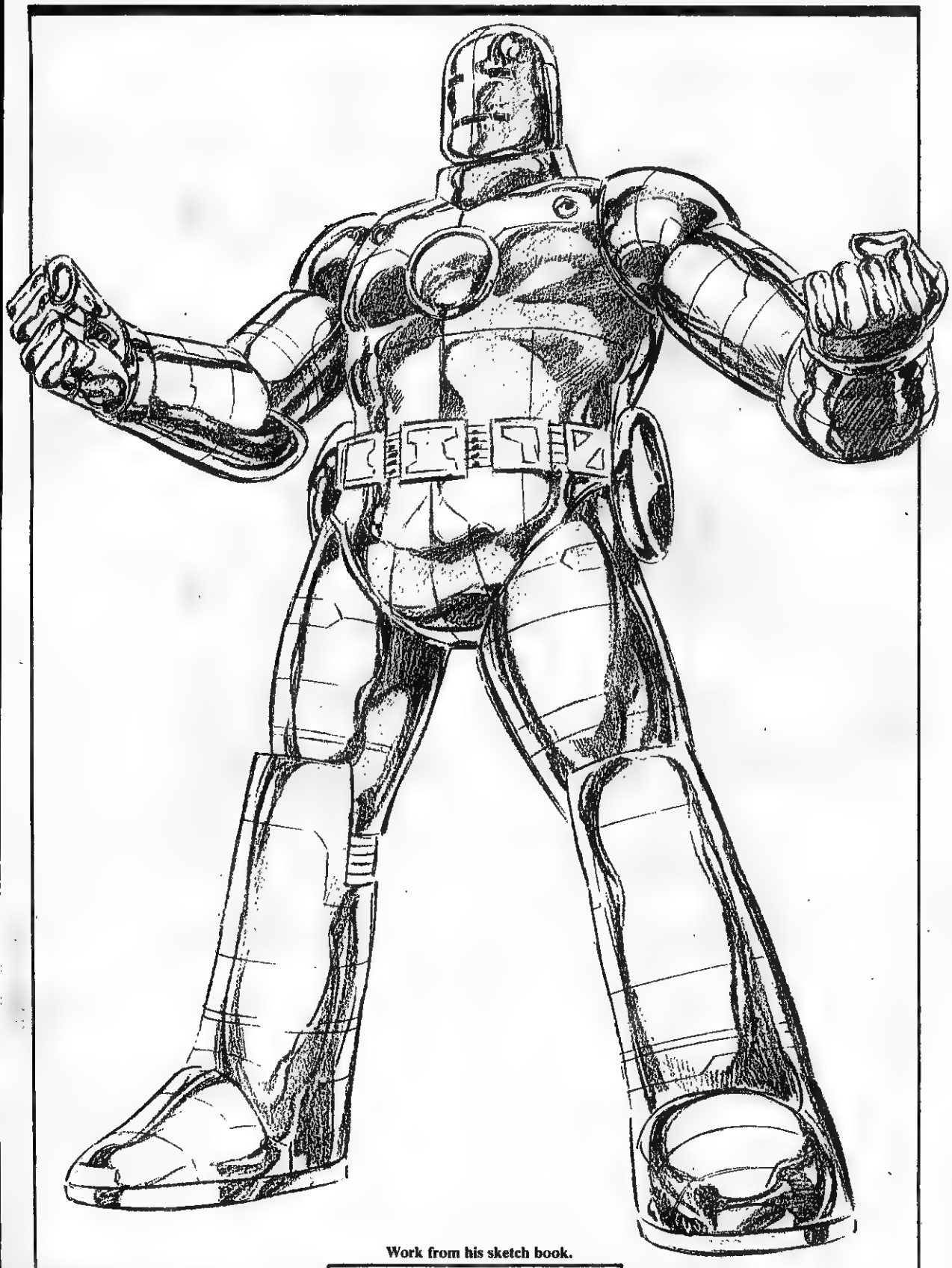
DWIGHT: *And it'll be in THE SHE-HULK.*

JOHN: Yes, you bet. Well, as you say, I created ALPHA FLIGHT. What I created was the original five or six guys who were Alpha Flight, *never* intending for them to have their own book, finding myself really pushed up against the wall when they *did* get their own book. I'm looking at these guys and going, "God, they have no personalities, who *are* they!" You know, this guy's the Hulk, this guy's Quicksilver, this woman's the Scarlet Witch. I had to shoehorn some personalities into them. I was *never* happy on ALPHA FLIGHT. What did I do, 28 issues, 38?



1950s-style calendar girl (done on Mac-Plus).

"How could Superman have sex? He'd kill the woman."



Work from his sketch book.

"I've lost touch, I don't know half these people."

THUMP!
WHAT...??
TOAD MEN, BYRNE??
TOAD MEN?
I THOUGHT THE COVER WAS JUST A GAG!
I WAS ALL SET FOR THE KREE OR THE SKRULLS...
OR EVEN THE CRUMMY KRYLOREANS!
BUT YOU STICK ME WITH THE TOAD MEN??

SHE-HULK & the Toad (Kirby/Lee) Men (from issue two). An example of breaking the "fourth wall".

DWIGHT: *You wanted to leave at one point and then you were convinced to stay on for a little bit longer.*

JOHN: I wanted to leave from about issue #22. *(Laughter.)* But I kept trying to figure out what I could do with the characters, and ultimately just said, "No, this doesn't work, it's not happening for me — it would probably be better if somebody else does something with them." That was when **Bill Mantlo** and I worked that trade for THE HULK. And then, unfortunately — for *various* reasons too silly to go into here — THE HULK didn't work out either.

DWIGHT: *That was around the time you were preparing to do Superman.*

JOHN: Yes.

DWIGHT: *To get Superman you won out over some rather stiff creative competition.*

JOHN: Yeah, an awful lot of people turned in their proposals, and mine was the one that got picked! I think that's something that a lot of people don't quite have, is a clear concept in their mind that I didn't walk in off the street one day and say, "*I'm* going to do SUPERMAN, stand back!" I turned in a written proposal, I had several long talks with Dick and Jenette and **Paul Levitz,** and ultimately they decided I should do it — not this guy, not that guy, not these other guys — and it went from there.

DWIGHT: *Could you give us a general background into how it all came about?*

JOHN: Okay. For about ten years I had been making noises, roughly since the first SUPERMAN movie with **Christopher Reeve** came out. I saw that and I said, "Golly, there are actually things you can do with this guy." That wasn't happening in the books. So I would go to

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"I felt he was spitting in Pa Kent's eye."

conventions and I would give interviews, every once in awhile I would say, "Oh, they don't know what to do with Superman at DC, they haven't got any idea what they're doing over there." *(Laughter.)* I had, in fact, talked to Dick one time — when I was still under contract to Marvel, but I was up at the DC offices for . . . *some* reason . . . oh, I'd done a piece for ACTION #500 and I was up there because they were taking a picture of all of us who'd worked on it, except **Steve Ditko** who doesn't photograph. *(Laughter.)* I stuck my head in Dick's office and he said, "Why don't you come and do SUPERMAN for us, you're always talking about it." And I said, "No, no way, 'cause you're going to have to kill Supergirl and get rid of Superboy and all that stuff." And then, of course, they *did* that, which was kind of scary.

Then I moved up here to Connecticut and I incorporated. It's hard for corporations to be under exclusive contract to anybody, so I let my exclusive contract with Marvel lapse — partly because I incorporated and partly because things were *eh-eh-eh* at Marvel, you know — John waves his hand in the air and makes funny noises. At almost the instant the contract lapsed **Dick Giordano** was on the phone saying, "We're actually going to do it, we're actually going to *fix* Superman, put your money where your mouth is." So I jotted down what I called my list of unreasonable demands — if you want me these are the things that you have to come across with. Much to the surprise of every fan in the world, not a single one of those unreasonable demands had anything to do with money. My rates at DC were exactly the same as my rates at Marvel, my royalties were lower. *(Laughter.)* Because DC books don't sell as well as Marvel books.

So I submitted this thing, we talked about it, and then ultimately Dick called me up and said that mine was the one they'd picked. I've always cherished this notion that mine was the one they picked because, despite the reaction of some of the more hard-core fans, mine was the one that showed the most *reverence* for the character, the most reverence for what was already there. I mean one guy turned in a proposal that started with Superman dead! *(Laughter.)* What I wanted to do was try and figure out . . . back to the basics is *not* the phrase that I would actually use, because I *wasn't* going back to the basics. Then I would have had him leaping tall buildings in a single bound.

What I thought was, "This is great, I'm sitting down to essentially 'create' a character, but I've got 50 years worth of stuff to draw on, I can pick the stuff that I like, that I think works the best." I could pick not just from the comics but from the cartoons, the TV show, the radio show, the cereal boxes, *everything!* This, of course, is where you run into the fans who got offended by what I did, who got upset by what I did, because obviously it had to come down to an arbitrary thing, and it had to be *my* call.

DWIGHT: *You're not going to please everybody.*

JOHN: I didn't even try. I just sat down and decided what I wanted to do and launched it with MAN OF STEEL.

DWIGHT: *Since you were born in England and raised for the most part outside the U.S., did this give you something of a hook into doing Superman, since he is an alien on earth?*

THE GODS...?
WELL, IT'S TRUE, I SUPPOSE, THAT I'VE ACCEPTED MANY OF THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF GODHOOD..
BUT WITH PRECIOUS FEW OF THE PERKS, I'M AFRAID.
YOU... UNDERRATE YOURSELF, SURELY..?

© DC Comics Inc

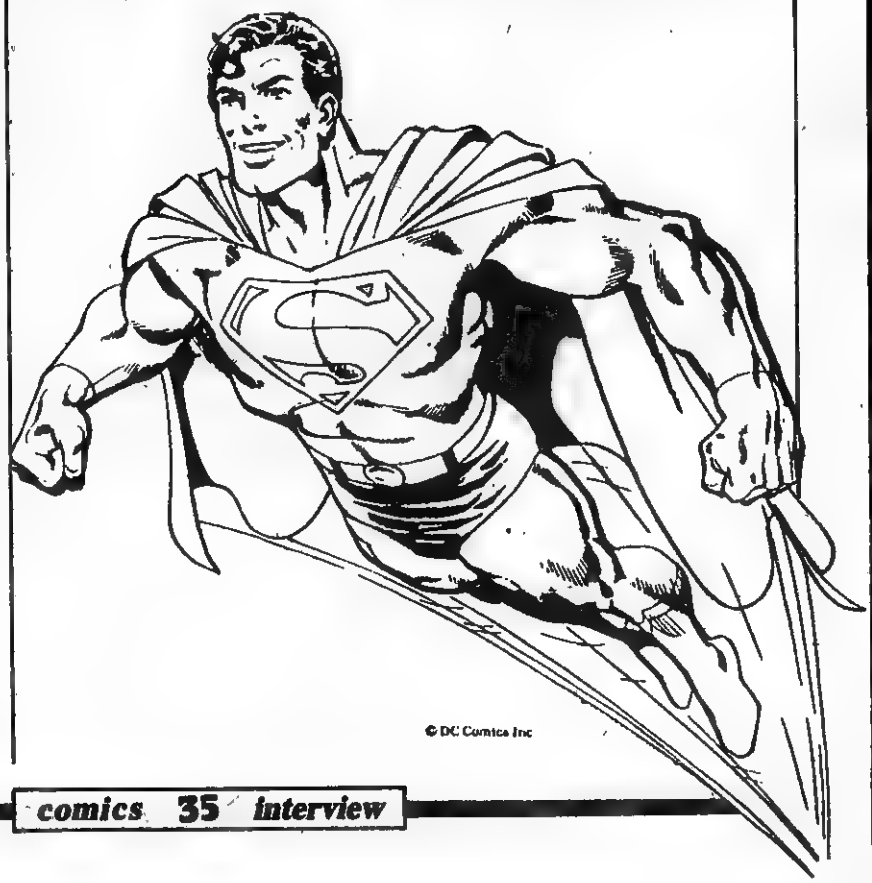
"They don't know what to do with Superman at DC."

"THEN IT HAPPENED! ONE DAY, OUT OF A CLEAR BLUE SKY, THE SUB-MARINER RETURNED!"
"NOT LONG AFTER CAPTAIN AMERICA HIMSELF WAS BROUGHT BACK IN HIS OWN TITLE AND A CONTINUING EFFORT WAS MADE TO BRING IN THE OTHER CLASSIC"
"ALL THE OLD HEROES STARTED COMING BACK."
"NAMOR AND I WERE SURE IT WOULDN'T BE LONG BEFORE THE JUSTICE LEAGUE WAS BROUGHT BACK, TOO."
"SUB-BY CAME BACK IN FANTASTIC FOUR #4 - CAP IN AVENGERS #4 - SEE THE PATTERN? BOBBIE C."
WE WAITED!
AND WAITED!

Above: Pencils from SHE-HULK #4. Below: More pencils, issue #5.

JOHN: No. The STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND thing was one of the things that I tried very hard to *downplay*. It had always troubled me that he was so relentlessly Kryptonian. In the *early* days, when I first started reading SUPERMAN, he was a babe in arms when he was launched. He got older as the years went by, he was a toddler, he was *talking*, by the time I stopped reading SUPERMAN in the '60s. I never liked the STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND thing. I always thought he landed, he was raised by the Kents, everything he is is due to the Kents. It's not due to Jor-El sending along a secret message tape that says do good stuff, he does good stuff because he had a good, strong, middle American BIBLE Belt *upbringing*. It troubled me so much every time he would say "Great Krypton" or check the Jor-El Tapes, I felt he was spitting in Pa Kent's eye every time he did that. It was Ma and Pa Kent who raised him, *they* gave him his life, they gave him his whole point of reference. I had him make a speech to that effect in the last issue of MAN OF STEEL, where he says, "I've got all these powers because I'm from Krypton, Krypton made me Superman — but it was the Earth that made me human."

That was the whole twist, the whole inversion of what he had become was that it's not Superman, it's this person. What makes him Superman is *not* that he can leap tall buildings or see through walls, what makes him Superman is that he doesn't use these abilities to make himself king of the world. He's got all this *stuff*, but he uses it for good. That's the definitive super-hero — if I can cross into that. One of the things that bothers me about a lot of the stuff that DC is doing, a lot of the stuff that's in comics in *general*



"People have forgotten what super-heroes are."

Faces from John's sketchbook.

these days, is that people have forgotten what super-heroes are.

Super-heroes are not psychotics who put on costumes and go out and kill people. Super-heroes are people who are *intrinsically* better than thee and me. They are more moral, they are more noble, and they're doing what they're doing because it's the right thing to do, not because they're crazy.

That was one of the things that bothered me about WATCHMEN, was that they were all nuts, they were *all* crazy! I was totally put off by Rorschach's origin. I really liked Rorschach in the first few issues, and then we get to the origin and discover that he was crazy *before* he put the mask on, he was screwed up before he *became* Rorschach. So they were all crazy, and I say these guys aren't super-heroes. There's an old term that we don't use anymore, costumed crimefighter, and *most* of the guys out there, all bred by Wolverine basically, are costumed crimefighters. They've taken Batman, for example, and changed him *from* a super-hero into a costumed crimefighter. You don't have to have super powers to be a super-hero, you just have to wear a funny suit and do good stuff, and they're all turning into costumed crimefighters instead of being super-heroes. They're not doing it because it's the right thing to do anymore.

DWIGHT: *Well, vengeance or . . . the instrument of vengeance seems to be a rising type — Punisher, Wolverine, and DC is having its share of blood-letting. On a personal level is that offending you, or —*

JOHN: Yes, it offends me very much. Call me old-fashioned, but I'm from the school that says these guys do this because deep down inside they know it's the right thing to do. They *don't* do it because they're crazy, they don't do it because they're *like* us, they do it because they're *better* than us. I remember a **Steve Martin** special years before any of this in which he did almost a parody of what's currently happening in comics. There was a group of cheerleaders doing their thing, and he walks up and says, "Hi, girls, I'm **Steve Martin.**" They continue talking, through him, and he's like waving his hands in front of their faces. "Why, I must be invisible," he says. "Why, I could serve my government! I could fight crime!" And then the next shot is two policemen dragging him out of the ladies' locker room. *(Laughter.)*

This is kind of a parody of what's happening now, where people get these amazing powers and then they do all the wrong stuff with them. It's as if doing the wrong thing for the right reason, or doing the right thing for the wrong reason, has become the whole thing. It's like doing it for the wrong reasons was Spider-Man, where he got the powers and his first thought was he was going to get rich! And then Uncle Ben was killed and that brought the truth home to him. Now, he *could* have just hung it up at that point, have said, "I screwed up, I'm going to put this away and just forget about it." But he didn't, he went out and became a super-hero. He was forced to become a super-hero, forced to deal with the fact that with great power there comes great responsibility. He didn't just walk away from it.

But there are too many other characters these days who . . . I can't relate to them anymore. They're not people I like, they're not people I would want to have over for dinner. I blame myself to some extent, too, because I was there in the embryonic period of Wolverine. I was the one saying, "Let's have him disembowel *this* guy this month." But Wolverine to me was one guy in a group of people who were for the most part doing it for the right reason. There was no reason for them to go out and fight crime, fight the bad guys, all of them had established that they could *pretend* to be normal, but they saw that they had a mission in life. Cyclops isn't out there doing this because he's crazy, he's out there because he thinks it's the right thing to do. And my whole thought on

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"The Marvel Universe is the world outside our window."

Cover illustration from WOLVERINE #17 (John's 1st issue as regular artist).

Wolverine was that he's in this group so we can keep an eye on him, so that we can make sure if he's going to kill people, we're going to channel it in the right direction so he only kills bad guys.

The definitive Wolverine scene that I've always had in the back of my mind, that I knew I could never do, would be Wolverine sitting at the breakfast table eating his Cheerios, Kitty comes in and says hi, and she says it in *just* the wrong tone of voice for that morning, so he disembowels her without even thinking about it. Because he is crazy. That was an interesting element of that character, he was almost unique in the framework of comics of the time — he was crazy. Now they're *all* crazy! Batman's crazy! I think it started because there were too many fans working in the industry. We all used to sit around saying, "Whoa, Batman must be crazy to do all this stuff." I'd say, "No, he's not crazy, he's better than us." But now there are fans working in the industry and they're still saying he must be crazy, so he is crazy because they play him as crazy.

DWIGHT: *Well, you're working on a Batman project of your own, so how does this fit into what's being done with Batman?*

JOHN: Well, I accepted the thing, a three-parter, because I was curious to see if I could *write* the current Batman, because I don't really *like* the current Batman. I had touched on it sort of *lightly* in the third issue of MAN OF STEEL, where you can see that he's very intense. I didn't want to play him as crazy, but he's very intense. And I thought, "What would happen if I did a story where he *is* this guy who breaks legs and that kind of stuff?"

I don't know exactly how much I will get into it, because as it turns out it's three parts and the *real* Batman hasn't ap-

"I will be trying *not* to do the Batman that I really like."

peared yet. *(Laughter.)* I'm in the third issue and he hasn't even appeared yet. The first part is a bunch of people *dressed* as Batman, the second part is a Commissioner Gordon story, and in the third part we finally get to the real Batman. It'll be an interesting experiment. I suspect that it will be pretty much indistinguishable from most of the Batman stories that have gone before, there won't be anything extraordinary about it. The whole *thrust* will be that I will be trying *not* to do the Batman that I really like, which is the sort of '40s Batman who was having a good time. He wasn't crazy, he was really enjoying himself.

DWIGHT: *What was your impression of DARK KNIGHT?*

JOHN: Well *visually* I thought it was *stunning*, I thought it was some of Frank's best work. I didn't care for the story. My impression — this is *purely* my impression, I have *no* idea if this is true — but my overall impression was that Frank had the first two issues done, and then he read however much **Alan Moore** had done on WATCHMEN, and that *changed* the last two issues. What made me think that was in the first issue we have a lady newscaster saying it's been ten years since Batman retired or died, they didn't *know* what happened to Batman, and then in the third issue there was a law that was handed down by the government and all the super-heroes were forcibly retired. So how come she doesn't know what happened to Batman then, if he was forcibly retired? Somewhere halfway through the series it turned into the Watchmen Universe, and I wasn't able to plug into the story. I sat there and looked at the pictures and just went "Wow!" all the way through, but I wasn't able to hook into the story.

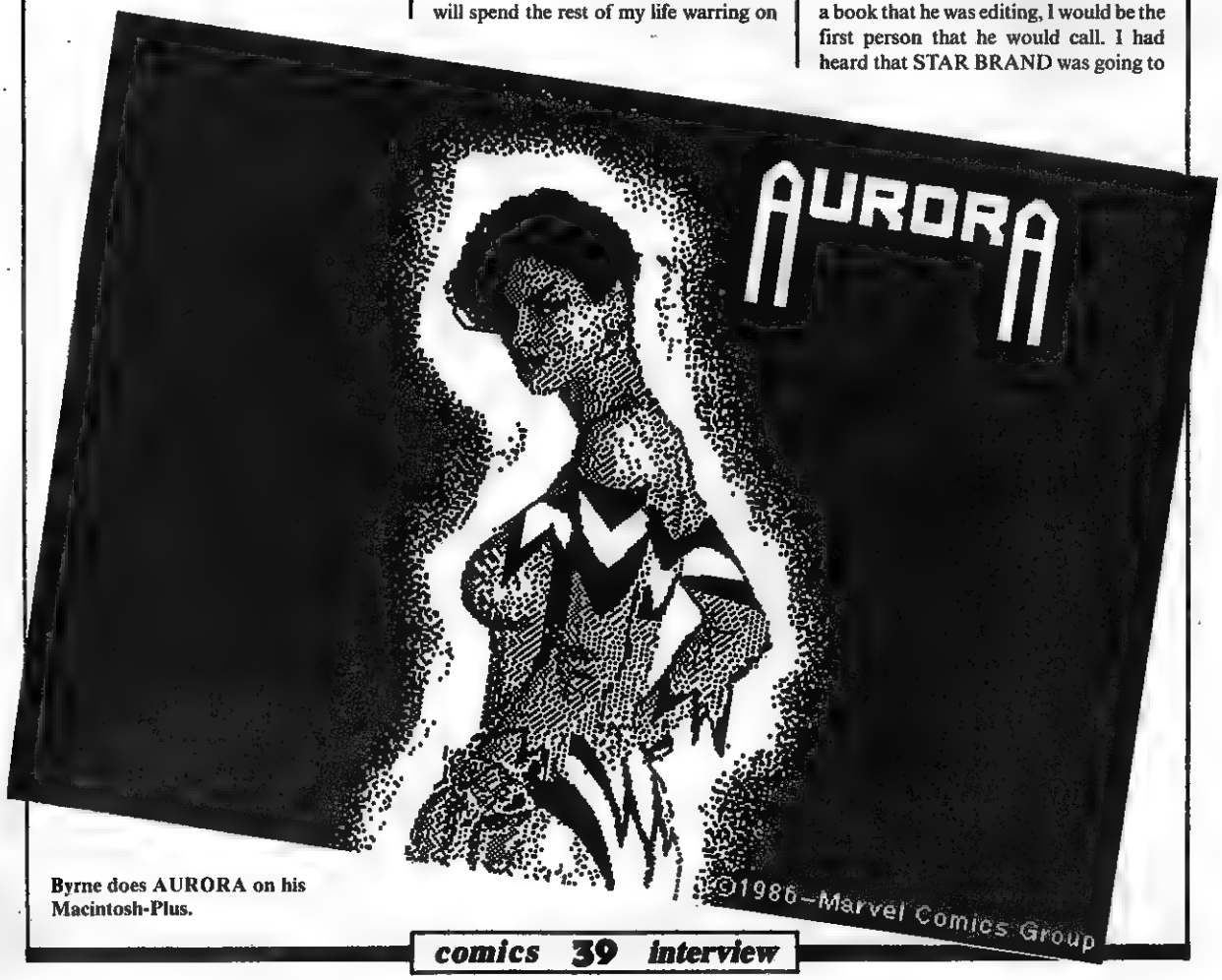
About a year after it came out I started to like *elements* of the story, thinking back on them, because I realized that intentionally or otherwise what Frank had done was much more the Batman that I like than the current psychotic Batman. He was *doing* the psychotic Batman, but it was a psychotic Batman that *worked* for me because he had a Batman who had retired. If you look at Batman and his whole *raison d'etre* — "I will spend the rest of my life warring on criminals," he says in his origin — so Frank gives us a Batman who has been retired for ten years and is *now* psychotic. Of course he's psychotic, he betrayed his oath and it pushed him over the edge. So the first reading of DARK KNIGHT I said, "No, this is the psychotic Batman I don't like," but later on I was able to say, "No, this is the Batman that I *do* like who has been driven crazy because he did the wrong thing." But overall I say, visually stunning, I just couldn't hook into the story.

DWIGHT: *Let's move over to the recently deceased New Universe.*

JOHN: *(Laughter.)* Gone and soon forgotten.

DWIGHT: *Well, not without certain memories. When you came back to Marvel after the run at DC, STAR BRAND was the first project that you really took on.*

JOHN: I hadn't actually even quit SUPERMAN at that point. That began more or less as a joke, really. **Howard Mackie** and I had developed this gag where he would be constantly asking me to do any book that became available — a book that he was editing, I would be the first person that he would call. I had heard that STAR BRAND was going to



Byrne does AURORA on his Macintosh-Plus.

"Having a naked lady in a comic

be available, for whatever reason, and Howard called — I picked up the phone and said, "Hi, Howard. No, I don't want to do STAR BRAND." *(Laughter.)* And that *wasn't* what he was calling about, but as we talked, all of a sudden I realized that I had STAR BRAND stories that I could do. So by the end of that conversation I had agreed that I *would* do STAR BRAND, provided that I only had to do the loosest of loose breakdowns, and that it stayed bi-monthly. Then we went on our merry chase. I was sitting in Howard's office one day and we were saying how we really needed to do *something*. "Well, let's blow up Pittsburgh." And it went from there.

DWIGHT: *Was it sort of a catharsis, getting rid of a lot of frustrations that you had?*

JOHN: Somewhat, yeah. I'd already done my one big zap at the whole New Universe thing in LEGENDS, with Green Lantern beating up a character who was sorta kinda like Star Brand. It was interesting, when the first issue of STAR BRAND came out a number of people complimented me on how restrained I was, that I didn't immediately turn Ken Connell into a rampaging maniac. But that wasn't my point, that never was my point. My point was to try and take this character and develop him along what I thought were logical lines for the established personality of the character.

DWIGHT: *But he did go rather power mad.*

JOHN: He went crazy after he destroyed Pittsburgh, wouldn't you? "I just killed a million people, oh, gosh . . . ooops." *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *That set up some fascinating scenes. This morning I was looking at . . . I'll call it the reincarnation scene, where he's in the church delivering the sermon. That is a rather complex thing. If you just came into that issue cold you'd go, "Where did this come from?"* (John laughs.) *I admire the way that you integrated a lot of emotion into Connell without destroying what the character was.*

JOHN: Well, the character was very clearly based on a real person, and I played him as . . . what I *perceived* as the established elements of that person. I played off of what previous writers had set up. And then having him blow up Pittsburgh, of course he goes off the deep end, it would have that effect on anybody. And then being blown up and not dying, that will hurt you somewhat too.

DWIGHT: *You had been away from Marvel for a while.*

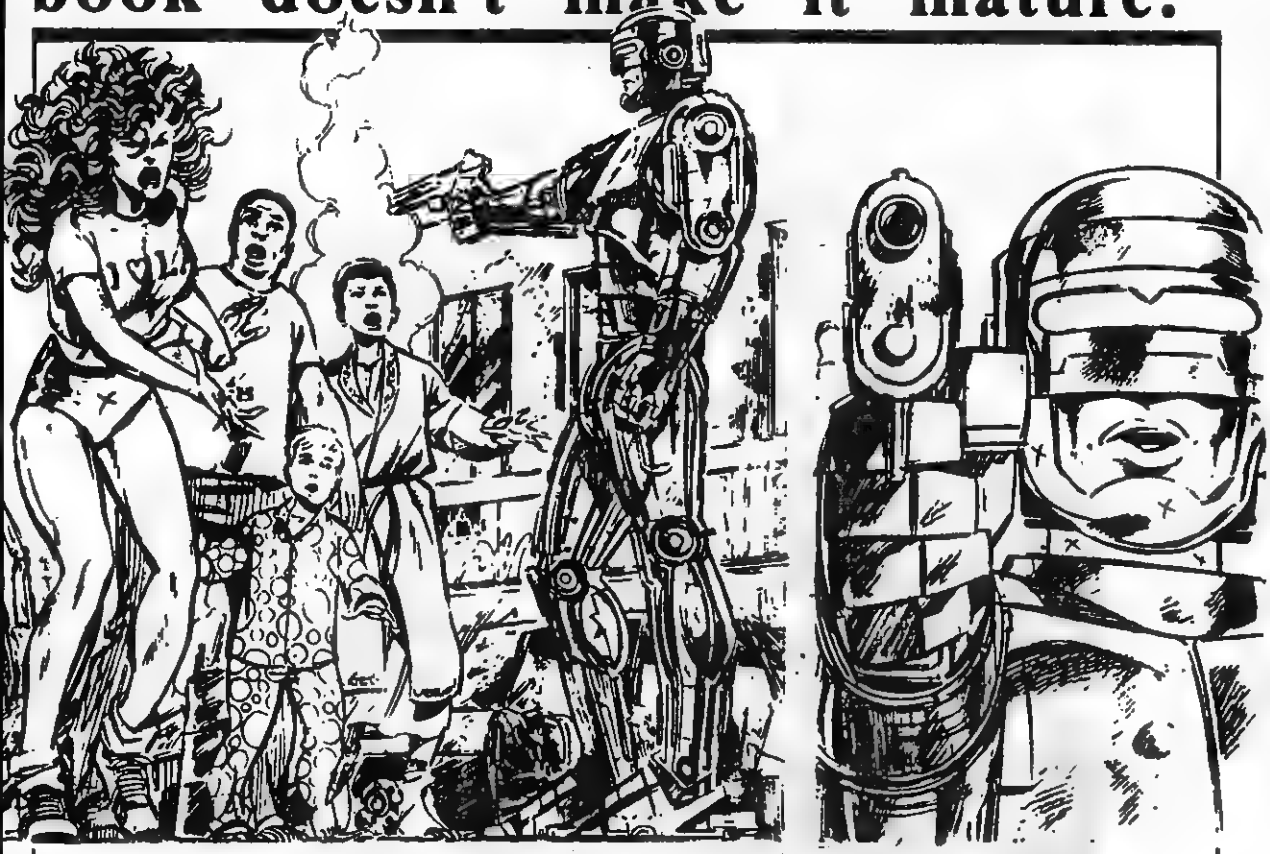
JOHN: About two years, two and a half.

DWIGHT: *How had Marvel changed when you came back?*

JOHN: *(Laughter.)* Well, I walked in and

STAR BRAND (#13): Script/breakdowns by Byrne (Palmer, Bulanadi & Rubinstein on art).

book doesn't make it mature."



Pencils from SHE-HULK, where she meets . . . yeah, him!

there were no familiar faces in the Bullpen for a start, that was scary. I'm walking down the hallways going, "Who *are* all these people!" *(Laughter.)* For the most part things hadn't changed *very* much. Different people were in charge, but they were people I knew. **DeFalco** is now editor-in-chief, I've known Tom for many years, I've worked with Tom in the past — I think I worked with Tom . . . I've done so much, oh, God!

DWIGHT: *I hear the brain is the first thing to go.*

JOHN: It is, it is. I'm losing my nouns these days. But for the most part the people who were important, the editors and fellow creators, were familiar. The guys in the Bullpen, that was always changing. The ten or twelve years I was with Marvel, there were always changing faces, except that I was *aware* of it. This time I was coming back to, "Oh, my God, different faces." For the most part it *looked* the same, it *felt* different. A release of tension had obviously occurred, people were having a good time again, which was great to see. It was like the Marvel that I started at, this was wonderful, so it felt good to come back.

DWIGHT: *Did you feel you had accomplished what you wanted to do in STAR BRAND and THE PITT and working on the New Universe?*

JOHN: Well, yes . . . yes, I was going to say "yes and no" but that's a silly answer. Yes, inasmuch as the idea was from the start to *really* do something radical. The approach that **Shooter** had taken on the whole New Universe was that it's the world outside your window, and he was taking that very very literally. The people doing the New Universe were supposed to somehow *convince* the readers that this stuff was actually happening now, in *this* world, which meant that nobody could ever *do* anything spectacular, because obviously that would end up in the papers or on TV. With the exception of Star Brand, of course — *he* was *allowed* to fight terrorists who had a nuclear bomb in New York Harbor, and things like that. But the *other* books —

DWIGHT: *Do as I say, not as I do.*

JOHN: Yeah, Spitfire couldn't do anything that would ever be seen, D.P.7 had to be hiding out all of the time, this kind of stuff. What we did, sitting around in Howard's office that day, we just said, "If the idea is that this is a new universe, that we're setting a whole new groundwork, then let's do that. Let's get rid of this idea that it's the world outside your window, and have an event that will clearly say it's new, it's different, things are happening." And blowing up Pittsburgh really did that. It was one of those things that obviously you can't do in the Marvel Universe, because in a funny sort of way the Marvel Universe is *closer* to being the world outside our window than the New Universe is, because you have to have the constant reference points. We realized that with the New Universe we *didn't* have to have the constant reference points, we could *really* screw around with it and end up in a totally different place if we wanted to — and ultimately we did, nuclear winter and all this kind of stuff.

DWIGHT: *If you were an editor-in-chief, had the power, what would be your guidelines to the creative staff?*

JOHN: Which company am I working for?

DWIGHT: *Let's do Marvel and then do DC.*

JOHN: At Marvel there wouldn't be that much I would change. There was a rumor during one of the early shaky periods for **Shooter** that Marvel had approached me to be editor-in-chief, and somebody told me that **Chris Claremont** was worried because he was afraid — I

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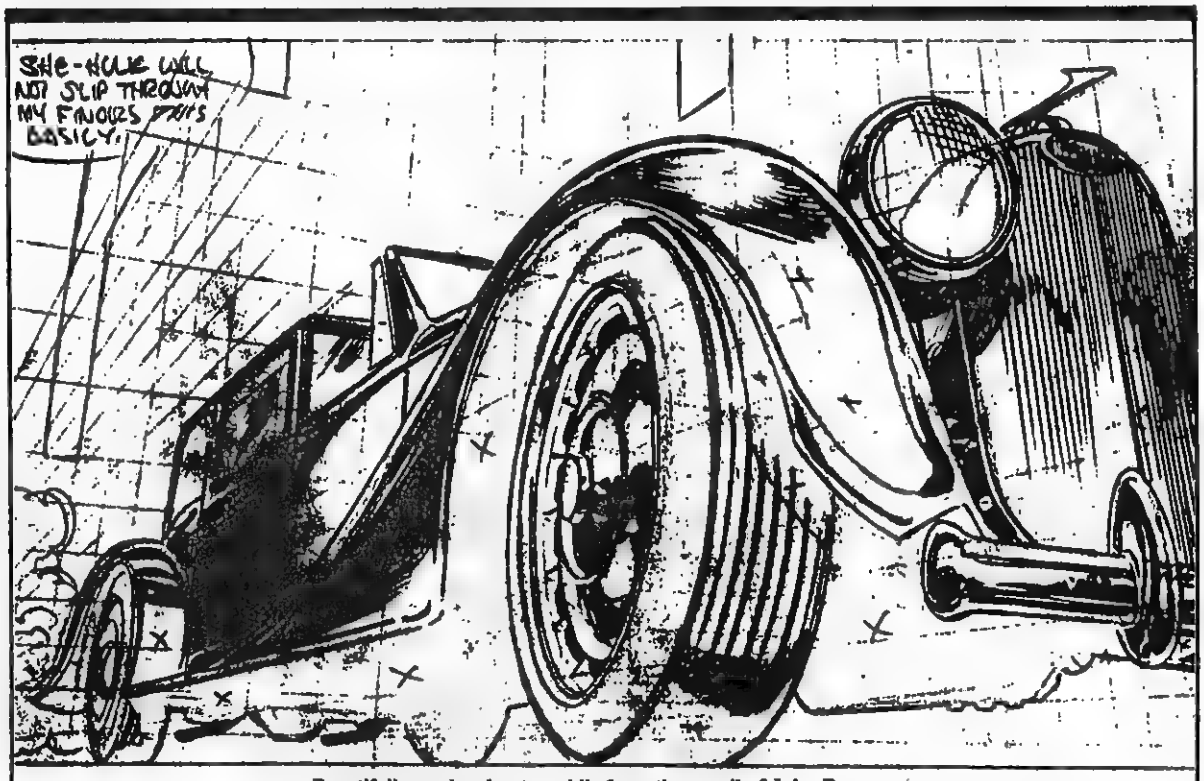
"DC needs Jim Shooter."

don't even know if this is true — but they told me that he was afraid I was going to come in as the editor-in-chief and I'd *rip* apart THE X-MEN. I remember saying to whoever it was that told me this, that Chris was the one person who would be absolutely bulletproof. As much as I really don't like what he's doing on THE X-MEN, it sells — and if it ain't broke, don't fix it. I'd go to Chris and say, "Keep doing what you're doing." And I'd also say, "And I'm watching your sales, so if it *drops* then —" *(Laughter.)* And that's what I would say to *most* of the Marvel editors if I was in charge. "Keep doing what you're doing. Watch out for the self-indulgence that some people get into, watch out for the storylines that go on forever, and watch out for the political, religious, sexual stuff that doesn't have a place in the comics." But no repression. "Do what Stan and Jack did, and try and do it better if you can."

At DC first I'd get out my deathray — I think that's what DC needs, a deathray. I've said — and now that I'm not there I can say it comfortably, without cringing — DC needs **Jim Shooter.** They need somebody who will go in with a deathray and really kick ass and take names, and force it back into some kind of a straight line. When I started working for DC, my first thought was that **Shooter** and **Dick Giordano** should trade jobs. **Shooter** had brought Marvel to a point about three or four years earlier where everybody was doing the jobs that they were best at; what they really needed from an editor-in-chief was a kindly father figure.

Fantastic Four (A Marvel Masterwork) Pin-Up by John.

"Creativity functions better under limited freedom."



Beautifully rendered automobile from the pencil of John Byrne . . .

Shooter effectively rendered himself redundant, he'd got *everybody* doing their jobs to the best of their ability, and from that point on all he could do was mess with it. It was fixed and he was fixing it more.

DC needed a clear, strong iron hand at the helm to say, "Don't do that, do this." They are too scattered at DC, the creative energies are going off in 101 different directions that have nothing to do with comic books. Comic books for me, as I say, are juvenile fiction, they fit *exactly* at that level with TOM SWIFT and NANCY DREW. That's what I want to do, that's what I'd like to see comics doing *more* of. I think this *adult* "Recommended For Mature Readers" thing is the wrong approach. Somebody, I think it might have been **Craig Russell** — I shouldn't name names because I'm not sure who the quote actually came from — but somebody said they're not doing *adult* fantasy, they're doing adolescent *preadult* fantasy.

DWIGHT: *Well, it's like romance comics, they weren't really geared for teenagers, it was for preteens.*

JOHN: Yeah, for little kids. To me having a naked lady in a comic book doesn't make it *mature,* saying "shit" in a comic book doesn't make it *mature* — especially if you have a badly drawn naked lady saying "shit" in a comic book. *(Laughter.)* When I look at some of the DC stuff these days, some of the "Mature" stuff, I just say, "God, this is badly drawn naked ladies saying 'shit!'"

DWIGHT: *It almost seems to be this is our excuse to exploit.*

JOHN: Yes. Again, it's too many fans in the medium. We used to sit around saying, "Gee, y'know, how could Superman have sex, he'd kill the woman. How could Mr. Fantastic have sex — nudge nudge wink wink." Well *now* all these fans are actually *doing* this stuff. And it's always sexual, it's *always* sexual. I think sex is just wonderful, I think everybody should have as much of it as they can get, but it doesn't really need to be in comics. The analogy I always make is that there are things in a character's life that I don't need to see in order to understand the character. I don't need to see a character in bed, I don't need to see the character going to the bathroom, in order to understand the character. You know, you commented on the obviously healthy sexuality of She-Hulk, but in the Code book itself we've never seen her *doing* anything, she just walks around enjoying herself. I did the same thing with Reed and Sue. They obviously had a healthy sexual relationship but we didn't need to see it on camera, we didn't even have to suggest it.

DWIGHT: *Certain things are best left behind closed doors.*

JOHN: M-hm.

DWIGHT: *One thing, when you mentioned Superman having sex it reminded me of WONDER WART HOG, you know the scene I'm talking about?*

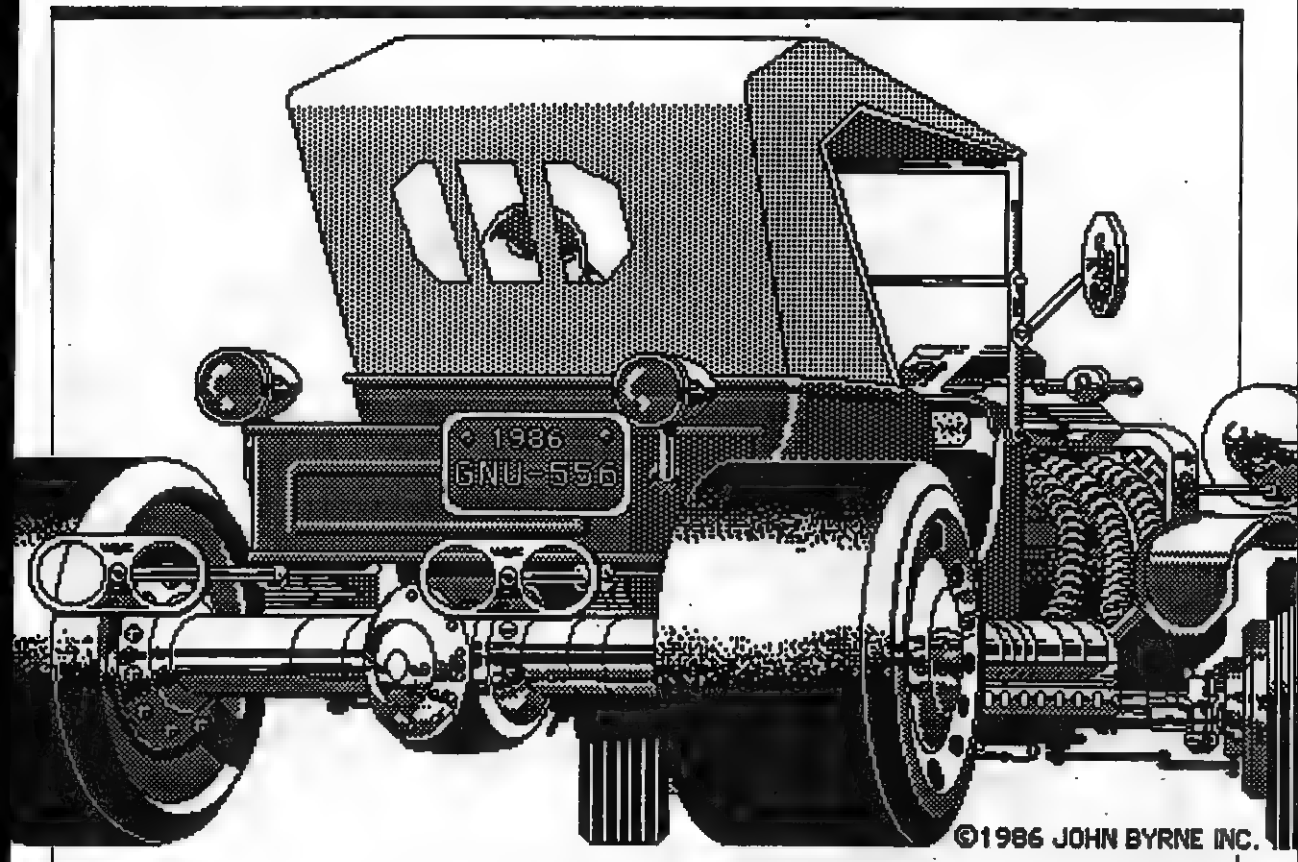
JOHN: "I'll use my snout!"

DWIGHT: *Yes! It struck me that the undergrounds — and they were "Adults Only" — but for them it actually worked. They treated it all not so much as a nudge nudge sort of thing, they just carried it to —*

JOHN: Yeah, everything was extreme in the undergrounds — *everything!* There were no normal human relationships in the undergrounds, because it was all totally bazooties. I didn't *see* that much of it because most of them didn't get into Canada. I used to visit *Roger Stern* periodically and he would have piles of them, and I'd sit down and read ZAP and go, "What the *hell* is this?" *(Laughter.)* That was where I was first exposed to people like **Corben** and **Robert Williams,** the guy who does the great chrome effects and all that stuff.

It was odd, actually, because I was on a panel at a Chicago convention, this would probalby be 1979 or 1980, which was myself, **Dick Giordano, Joe Kubert, Mike Grell,** and **Mike Gold** was the moderator, and . . . who was way at the other end . . . somebody else, I don't

"Stan told me that — — — — was gay."



. . . and yet another auto from Mac-Plus & J.B.

remember. But anyway, the question was directed to the panel, "How do we find working under the Code and would we all like to see the Code go away?" At that point I had just been zapped by the Code for the first time, they had just had something "fixed" that I had done, and I was peeved. It was a rear end shot of Storm, they thought I'd cut her bikini briefs too high so that you could see too much rear end, and I was peeved because I'd done exactly the *same* shot in the previous issue and they hadn't been bothered by it — so I was starting to think it wasn't the Code, it was whoever it was looking at the stuff that day. So I said, "I'd like to see the Code go away, I'd like to see them all burned in effigy," and all this.

And then Dick pointed out that the stuff that **Stan Lee** and **Jack Kirby** and **Steve Ditko** had done, the stuff that we all think of as *definitive* comics, was done under one of the most *stringent* periods of the Code. That just turned my whole head around — they did all of that great stuff! You go back and read it, there's no sex, and the violence is all very abstract, there's no blood, there's no little things in there to try and trick the Code . . . I've lost my whole train of thought here.

DWIGHT: *We were talking about sex.*

JOHN: Sex and violence, they're always one word. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *This brings up the whole debate of whether creativity flourishes better under total freedom or under lots of restrictions.*

JOHN: I think creativity functions better under *limited* freedom, because you're forced to be creative. You are forced to come up with ways to do the things you want to do within the structure, within the rules. I think the current crop of comic books coming out that are just, you know, Liberty Hall, are not as clever, are not as creative, as people think they are. Recently a *certain* highly placed person was very proud of the *adult* stride forward made by one of the books produced by the company this person worked for, because it featured the first full frontal male nudity and this was ground breaking. What it amounted to was a figure on the printed page who was about three inches tall with this little long "J" shape in his genital area.

These are the wonderful great strides that we're making that we can draw attention to? It's like I'm embarrassed whenever PLAYBOY does a retrospective, and they say, "And here's **Paula Kelly**, that was the first time we did pubic hair." Who *cares?* You know, who cares! You don't have to make like this was a major historical event! Come on, this doesn't matter! One of the things that bothers me is that often stuff like that is blown out of proportion and it comes to be viewed as ground breaking. And you will see so-and-so getting huge amounts of credit for doing ground breaking stuff, and then they'll say, "But somebody else did it earlier, back here."

Recently in BUYER'S GUIDE **Steve Englehart** wrote a letter talking about how he had created the first homosexual character for the mass media. I'm sitting there going, "I'm sorry, I thought *I* did that. I thought Northstar was the first seen to be known to be homosexual character for the mass media." And what was funny, of course, was in November I was in Mansfield, Ohio, to a convention, and Stan was there, and Stan told me that Percy Pinkerton of SGT. FURY fame was gay — in those days it was homosexual. So you're not even close to first, Steve. *(Laughter.)* I mean now that I think about it, Percy Pinkerton is a really

"I've typecast myself by choice."

John's cover from the Fantastic Four trade pbk: Trial of Galactus.

"It's comic book art, not COLLIERS."

obvious name. So it's one of those situations where the people who blow their trumpets the loudest get attention for breaking ground.

And too many people these days — here I am coming finally back to where I started — are trying to break ground that I don't think *needs* to be broken. We don't need to see the sexual activities of the characters, we don't need to see them going to the bathroom, we don't even have to see them eating. We know they eat.

DWIGHT: *What do we need to see?*

JOHN: Well, it's hard to define. I've said I would like to draw a comic or make a movie someday in which the character does absolutely nothing that's a given, that we know. If a character says he's going to City Hall, we don't need to see him driving there, so the next scene is he's at City Hall. The other side, of course, is that I feel there's a lot of hypocrisy involved in all of this stuff. I. . . I'm not a big fan of porno movies, I think they're fine and they exist and they *should* exist because some people need that kind of stuff. But it bothers me in sort of regular movies when you have your obligatory nude scene, obligatory sex scene, where nothing happens! My attitude to that has always been either show it or don't. Either this scene should be hard-core and go all the way, because obviously there's something important that we need to learn about this person, *or* if there isn't then we don't need this scene.

DWIGHT: *Did you see the movie NAME OF THE ROSE?*

JOHN: Yes.

DWIGHT: *There is a scene exactly as you described, and it actually works — at least I felt it was a rather powerful scene.*

JOHN: Yeah. That is a good example, we learn something about the character. One of the movies that we recently underlined doing it wrong for me was GORKY PARK. We were watching that on cable, and there's a scene where **William Hurt** and the woman are rolling around together in the sack and we learn absolutely nothing. The scene is significant in that an important barrier between these two characters has fallen but we learn that before they get their clothes off. I remember saying to my wife, "If they're going to to do this then why don't they just do it, why don't we have a quick little six minute hard-core pornography scene in the middle of this movie if it's that important?" This is a movie where we're seeing bodies with their heads cut off and maggots crawling all over decomposed skulls and stuff like this, so it's not like there are any sensibilities we're worried about offending here, you know. I'd rather see a naked lady than a skull with maggots crawling all over it. But whatever the point was they were trying to make there, they didn't, for me.

DWIGHT: *The one thing that placed a bit of perspective on it for me, once it was brought to my attention, was the fact that you can show violence all you want to in comics, but sex you can't, yet violence is far more damaging, sex is actually a healthy thing.*

JOHN: There's a great line about movies, I don't know who said it first and this will obviously be a fiftieth generation paraphrasing — if you have a naked woman in a scene, if you cut off her head with a buzzsaw you'll get an R rating, if you fuck her you'll get an X. I think that speaks much about our society. I think the original is even kinder, I think they said if you made love to her, which is different, a much softer, sweeter phrase. But it's true. These are things that. . . like I'd go to a movie with an R rating and if someone said "shit" in the first minute then I knew there wouldn't be any naked ladies in it. *(Laughter.)* It's the pendulum effect, of course. We hadn't had *any* sort of sexuality in comics for so long that we're going the other way now, going too far the other way. We'll come back. We'll probably go all the way back the other way and become incredibly repressive again — twin beds, one foot on the floor.

DWIGHT: *Is there a character in comics that you would feel uncomfortable doing, that you would prefer not to touch?*

JOHN: *(Pause.)* The way you phrased the question might be a little too strong for the answer, but the one that imme-

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"I think I am a very good comic-book artist."

diately springs to mind is Doctor Strange. I think my style would be wrong for Doctor Strange. Whether or not my style would adapt, I don't know. I've enjoyed doing Doc as a guest star here and there. **Ralph Macchio** tried to persuade me to do DOCTOR STRANGE, and I actually went so far as to call Bobbie and say, "Can we do SHE-HULK bi-monthly so I can do DOCTOR STRANGE as well?" She said no and I said thank you. *(Laughter.)* So, Doctor Strange is the first character who actually springs to mind as somebody I would probably ultimately be wrong for.

But except for characters who I think have stupid costumes and that would be hard to draw, there are no characters who I deliberately avoid. There are characters that I don't particularly want to draw, such as the Taskmaster, that sort of composite Avengers character who's got everything in the world *and* the kitchen sink in his costume. But for the most part I've had fun with just about everybody. Is there anybody I haven't done? I did LEGENDS, so I did everybody at DC. *(Pause.)*

DWIGHT: *Gumby.*

JOHN: Gumby, I haven't done Gumby. Well, he's not a comics character. He's one of them licensed things, I don't do licensed things.

DWIGHT: *As Salicrup pointed out, anyone who works for Marvel or DC is practically working on licensed characters.*

JOHN: Yeah. I like the term that **Don Thompson** used in a recent editorial in BUYER'S GUIDE, sharecropping. I like that, we're sharecroppers working on somebody else's farm. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *Well, that's better than indentured servitude.*

JOHN: Sure enough. That's how it got started.

DWIGHT: *You had Keith Williams as your background inker for your SUPERMAN material.*

JOHN: On those jobs that I inked myself, yes.

DWIGHT: *I'd just like to get into the system here a little and talk about things like why artists use background inkers.*

JOHN: Well, it's faster for one thing.

DWIGHT: *Is there a question of compromising the quality? I mean people are buying John Byrne, they expect to see John Byrne. Is it somehow compromising?*

JOHN: Well, it depends on what you're starting with. If you're starting with breakdowns and the situation as it mostly occurs where an inker is having one of his *trainees*, as it were, doing the background, then there's a compromise I think. When you have somebody who really knows what they're doing on the figures, and somebody who's just barely figuring it out on the backgrounds, and you can *tell*, then there's a problem. But Keith is a competent inker, in fact I was *hating* it when he was starting to get regular work as an inker, I knew I was going to lose my background man. I kept giving him more money so he would do my backgrounds.

DWIGHT: *And you still lost him.*

JOHN: We always lose our background men. All the good inkers turn into pencillers, with the exception of **Terry Austin**, and all the good background men turn into inkers.

DWIGHT: *And Terry's a writer now.*

JOHN: Yeah, a writer-inker, what a concept. But again, as I say, it depends upon just what the mix is. An example of this happening in its prime, the first Superman/Spider-Man book was **Dick Giordano** with **Terry Austin** doing his backgrounds, there was no loss of quality there. There was an issue of THE FANTASTIC FOUR that I did where **Joe Sinnott** was originally supposed to ink the whole iob himself, and then for

John's ROGER the Robot meets S-H (from issue nine).

"The basic dime comic, that was real. Then they found

some reason he had to farm out the backgrounds and I had done the backgrounds with **Sinnott** in mind — but it went to one of his background men, not one of his *best* background men, and it was these wonderfully rendered figures standing inside a coloring book, just *flat* backgrounds. So there can be a loss. But there's so many different permutations to the equation, you just never know.

DWIGHT: *One of the advantages artists have is they can get assistants, it's hard for a writer to do that.*

JOHN: Yeah. Do you want to do my nouns this morning? *(Laughter.)* I very rarely use assistants, I would like to make that very clear, and when I do I always credit them. A tradition in the industry that I *loathe* is that background men and assistants are not credited. I have always made sure that if I don't do the whole job *myself*, it says so.

DWIGHT: *In the evolution of John Byrne's art, fans were loving what you were doing in THE X-MEN, hating what you were doing in THE FANTASTIC FOUR for quite awhile — what's the impression now?*

JOHN: I don't know, actually. You know, the only scale of reference that I have is how many people are buying the book, and I've talked in the past about having what I call my faithful fifty, which is 50,000 people who seem to follow me wherever I go. Howard called me up a week ago, they had just got the direct sales figure on the first issue of WEST COAST AVENGERS and it had gone up by almost *exactly* 50,000. So I guess the people who used to like my stuff, who've always liked my stuff, *still* like my stuff. Whether the people who were disenchanted by some of my FF work, as I know they were, whether they've returned to the fold . . .

I never returned to the fold. Anybody who ever disenchanted me, I *stayed* disenchanged. I was disenchanted with MOONLIGHTING two years ago and have steadfastly not watched it since. But then I'm a cruel and senseless beast. *(Laughter.)* I don't know what the reaction will be. There's one frame of reference, one scale I was able to make when I was at DC, which was that I was doing full pencils on SUPERMAN and breakdowns on ACTION, and ACTION consistently sold less by a big number, like a third less. So those people out there want a *full* dose of whatever the hell it is I'm doing.

DWIGHT: *And can tell the difference.*

JOHN: Yeah.

DWIGHT: *Do you feel a problem of being typecast?*

JOHN: If I'm typecast, I've typecast myself by choice, by the fact that I have not really explored other kinds of art. I do a lot of fiddling about on the computer these days, with artwork, but I'm not getting into heavy-grade computer graphics or anything like that. Basically I am just a guy who pushes a pencil, or some *variation* of a pencil. I think I do that very well within the comic-book format. But if somebody asked me to do a **James Montgomery Flagg** style rendering of **Rosalind Russell**, I'd have to say I can't do that stuff, I just don't have the training for it. I did three years in fine arts in college, but that was nearly 20 years ago and I've forgotten more than I learned. So I'm very much aware of what I'm good at and what I'm not good at.

DWIGHT: *Who do you think is a great comic-book artist?*

JOHN: Great? At his peak **Jack Kirby** was probably one who exploited the medium to the maximum effect. I think Jack really *defined* what is comics done right, especially the **Kirby-Sinnott** period on THE FANTASTIC FOUR. That is comic book *art* at its finest to me. There are other people who do their own particular riff as *well*, but they're not as *definitive* as Jack. I think **Joe Kubert** is a superb artist, but he goes in a whole different direction from Jack. It's still comic-book art, it's not something you'd expect to see in COLLIERS. **Gil Kane** is another one. The old guys, the guys who were there. **Steve Ditko**, we must never leave out **Steve Ditko. Ditko** and **Kirby** are probably two of the major influences on my formative years as a comic-book artist. And then you get people like **Neal Adams**, who brings a whole *illustrative* approach that's very different from regular comic-book art.

DWIGHT: *Of the new people, in other words the artists who have come into their own within the past five years —*

JOHN: The ones who think of *me* as one of the *old* guys! *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *Who do you think is particularly outstanding among them?*

JOHN: I think **Paul Ryan** is very very good. He's a year older than me, but he's one of the new guys. Who else is there, who do I look at? I think **Todd McFarlane** is doing some astounding stuff. *(Pause.)* There's been too much turnover, that's the problem. There have been people who have come and gone. I thought **Paul Smith** was going to be the next titan, but he lasted five minutes and then he was off doing something else — I

a way to make the crummy printing even crummier."

don't even know where he is these days. I think **Craig Russell** does beautiful work, but he's not really one of the new guys. Who *are* the new guys? They're going to read this and be deeply offended because I don't know who they are.

DWIGHT: *Does John Byrne feel any competition now, either with himself, with his reputation, or from other people?*

JOHN: Always as an artist . . . I don't know if it's competition per se, I always feel *threatened* by other artists. New guys come along who are good, my first instinct is to go and break their fingers. *(Laughter.)* One of the things, too — I mean I have this reputation of having this monstrous ego . . . my ego is only the size of Nebraska, it's not the size of the entire United States. I *don't* think that I am the best thing that ever came down the pike. I don't think I rate much more than a footnote in the history of comics. But this puts me in a position of just being driven *crazy* every time somebody comes along who is good.

DWIGHT: *John Byrne is insecure.*

JOHN: **John Byrne** is an insecure person, yeah. *(To recorder.)* **John Byrne** hates all these new guys, he wishes they would all go away. *(Laughter.)* It was funny, when **Frank Miller** first came along, he was obviously going to be the next hot new guy and I offered Frank a few pieces of handy advice, all of which he has long since thrown away because he doesn't need them anymore. But he said that he was very grateful that I was, you know, offering him *my sage knowledge* from actually having been in the business three minutes longer than he had. I said, "Well, it's obvious that you're going to be the next hot kid, you're going to be the one that's going to dethrone me *this* year, so I'm going to *help* you." For a long time there I was number two, I was in the permanent number two spot; there was always somebody else who was number one, but I had staying power. I always knew that whoever was number one this week wouldn't be number one next week, but I'd always be there firmly entrenched at number two.

DWIGHT: *You impressed editors with your ability to produce.*

JOHN: Well, yeah. *(Laughter.)* I'm fast, I'm dependable — professional is the word *I* like to use. If they ask me for a job in a week, I'll get it in a week.

DWIGHT: *Looking back on your career, your output and consistency is striking. This is starting to sound like "let me praise," but —*

JOHN: I don't mind. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *But it's what editors at Marvel have said repeatedly. It's almost like . . . it's almost like editors more need someone they know can meet a deadline, than they need a person who is Mr. Fave Rave. They* like *that guy, but it's still a business.*

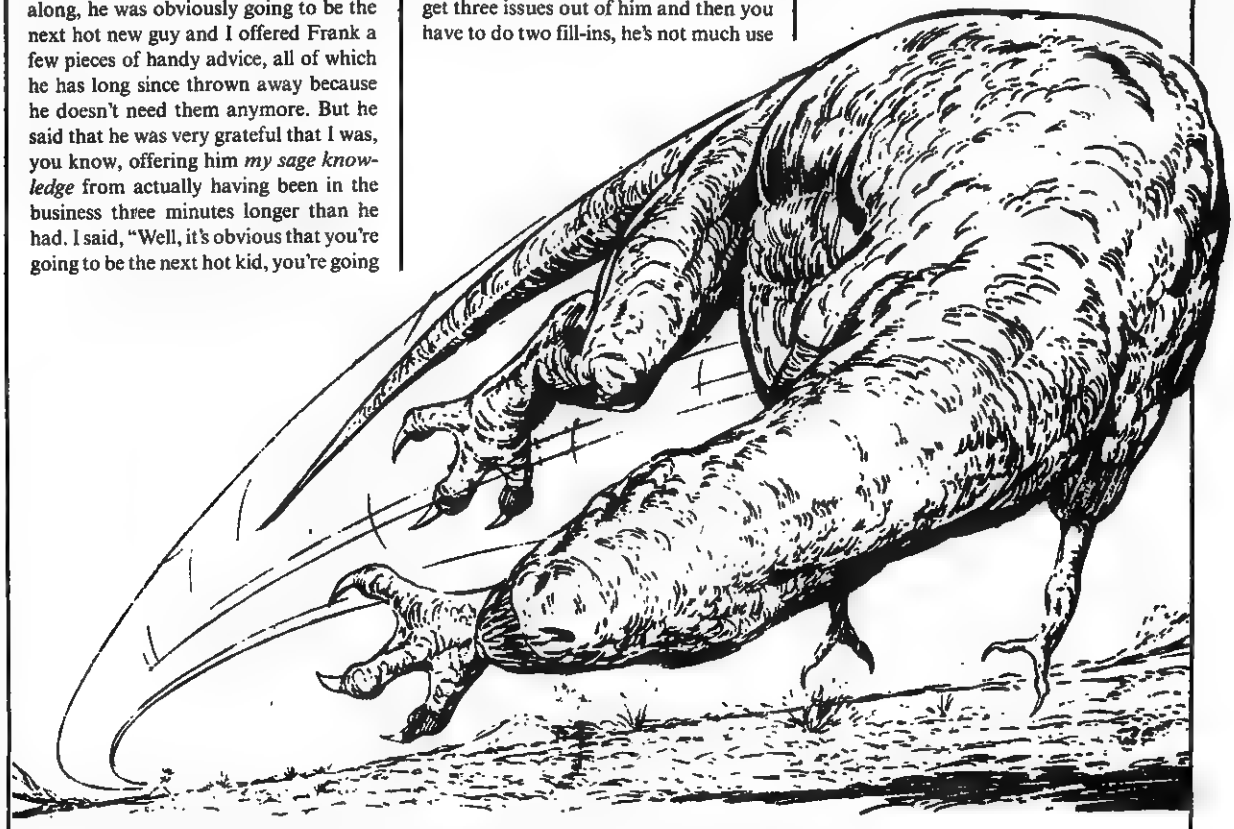
JOHN: Yeah, you still have to crank these things out every month. There's not much good in having a superstar who is a flake. If you've got a superstar and you get three issues out of him and then you have to do two fill-ins, he's not much use to you.

DWIGHT: *There are many different formats available for comics these days. There is the basic dime comic format — I'll call it that since that's what I used to pay for them, date myself a little bit — and it goes up from there. You've already mentioned your feelings about all of these different formats. Have your opinions changed?*

JOHN: Well, I used to say that real comics for me were the newsprint comics — the basic dime comic as you say, that was real. Then they found a way to make the crummy printing even crummier, so we've got Flexographic on plastic plates, or Silly Putty plates or whatever the hell it is they use these days. SHE-HULK is in the so-called Excalibur format, I specifically requested that, and I'm trying to get both AVENGERS books put onto that format, too, because I think it better serves the finished product.

DWIGHT: *It's hard to read when the type and the art drop out.*

JOHN: Yeah. The *old* newsprint stuff used to look *good*. It was on metal plates and it was solid 100% colors, not this kind of *bleh* stuff that it is now. I looked at the MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS with my SHE-HULK preview, that's *not*



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"I want to be as rich as the fans think I am."

on Flexographic but *looks* like it might have been. There's one scene in it where the color down the side of the page is all polka dot *blobs* of color. I looked at that and thought, "What the hell is this?" That's got nothing to do with what I think of as real comic books. So the best format for me right now, I think, is the Excalibur format.

I *don't* like shining paper, you have to *angle* the thing so you can see what you're looking at. In the latest crop of MARVEL MASTERWORKS that came out, the hardcover reprints, the FANTASTIC FOUR volume has a bunch of pages that were printed on the wrong paper — and it's *great* paper, it's *wonderful* paper, it's like I've never seen comics reproduced in that format that look *so* good as they look on the *wrong* paper! And then the next page is shiny and you're having to angle the book again.

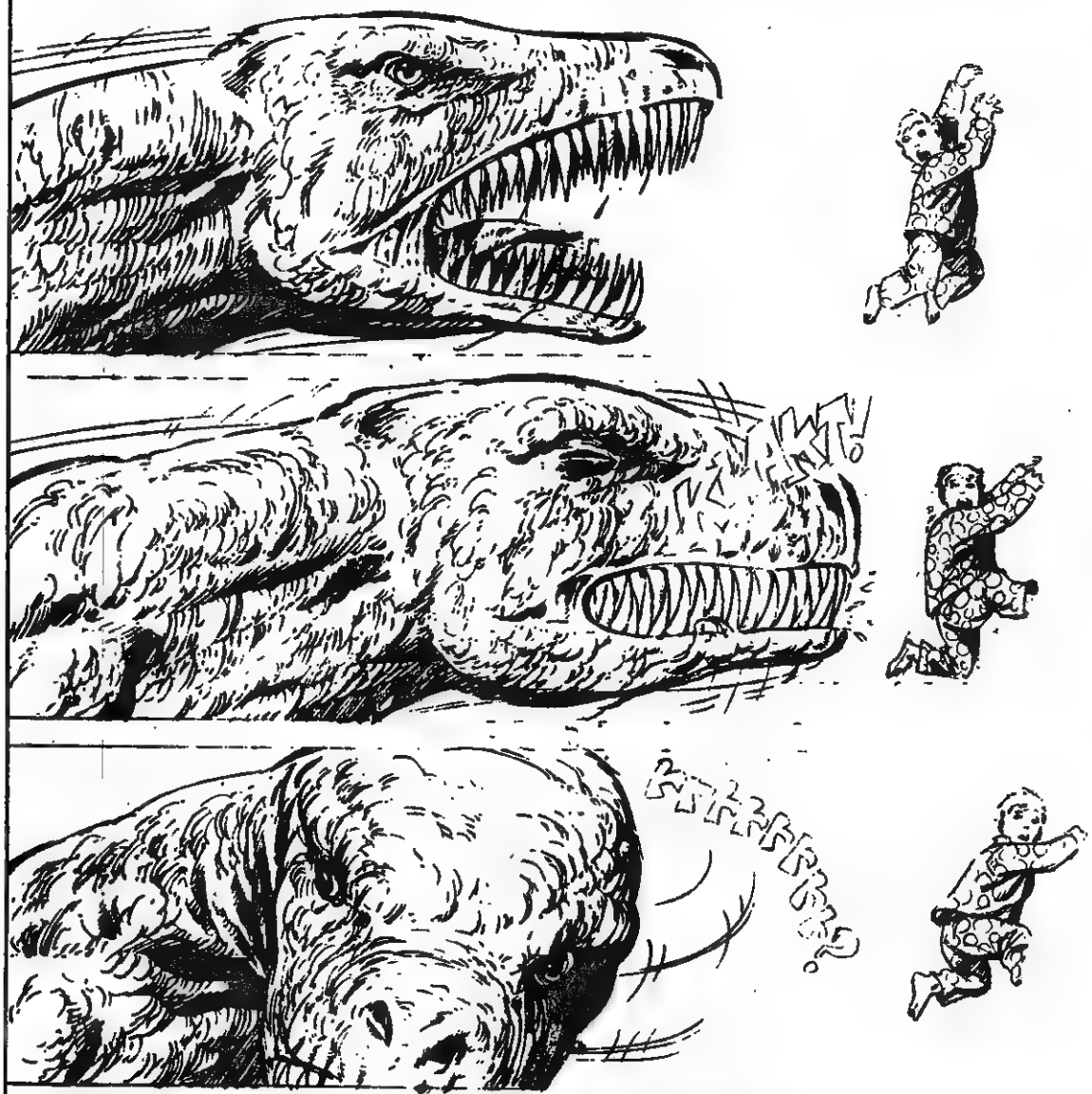
DWIGHT: *I noticed that too, it is rather nice.*

JOHN: This is good stuff, I wish they had done the whole book that way. It's thicker too, though, so it would probably be five tons of book. *(Laughter.)* But yeah, lots and lots of formats. The old newsprint dime comic format is dying, or self-destructing, since it's becoming impossible to produce one that's really worth the effort of reading. Let's upgrade it one step, go to the Excalibur format, and then we can have all of the graphic novels and everything else. I've worked in *most* of the formats now, or my stuff has been reprinted or somehow reproduced — I mean MAN OF STEEL was put out in 27 different formats it seemed, by the time they were done.

A line drawing that John will make a painting of (calendar piece).

"Apparently I'm always saying brilliant things,

DWIGHT: *Does your knowledge of the format of a book influence your art?*
JOHN: Never very much. The major influence of format on my art was on STAR BRAND, where I knew that I had full bleeds on every page. I took advantage of that — too much, I think, in the first few issues. Format has very rarely affected me, a comic book is a comic book, what I draw is what I draw. I don't have that great a range, let's not kid ourselves.
DWIGHT: *Is John Byrne being modest and saying he's a man of limited talent?*
JOHN: Well, yeah. A man has got to know his limitations — John says impersonating **Clint Eastwood**. I think I am a very good comic-book artist, but I also recognize that I am not a *great* comic-book artist, and I recognize that simply by saying "comic-book artist" I narrow the field substantially. I *don't* think I'm a great artist, I don't think I'm a very good artist, generally. I can't paint at all. My sketching, if I go out and try and draw a landscape, it's going to come out looking like I meant it for a comic book. That's what I focussed myself into. The only work I've ever done outside the comic-book field was really comic-book related, like the job I did for Dancer-Fitzgerald was *literally* two pages of comic-book art. I'm very much aware of my limitations at this point. If I go somewhere else in my career, it's going to be *away* from art, not into other fields of art.
DWIGHT: *What new worlds does John Byrne want to conquer?*
JOHN: *(Pause.)* What *do* I want to do? On a superficial level, I want to be as rich as the fans think I am. *(Laughter.)* No, I want to be as rich as other people in the industry think I am, 'cause that's even richer. I do want to write more, I've got a whole bunch of novels that I want to write.
DWIGHT: *You did a paperback not too long ago.*
JOHN: Yes. I have joined the legion of comics people who have one novel. *(Laughter.)*
DWIGHT: *Can we expect more?*
JOHN: I hope so. Warner Books has my



because people are always quoting me."

second one right now, I'm waiting to hear from the editor whether he hates it, whether it's going to be one of my **Bachman** books in ten years. *(Laughter.)* I'd like to have *several* novels to my name, in several different genres. Somebody quoted me once as saying I'd like to *be* a genre — apparently I'm always saying brilliant things, because people are always quoting me. I can never remember saying it. Yeah, I'd like to be a genre, the way **Stephen King** is a genre. I'd like to see movies made of my books, but I don't want to be the guy who writes them, unless it's a first draft and then they can do whatever they want with it. I have really no interest in getting into the Hollywood game, it's all nuts. And I'd like to live until a ripe old age — that's the *major* new world I want to conquer.

DWIGHT: *What does John Byrne read when he's not working?*

JOHN: Lots of different things, actually. Right now I'm reading a history of the Civil War called THIS HALLOWED GROUND by **Bruce Catton.** I've got a whole row of books on my beside table, a biography of **Edward R. Murrow,** a history of the '50s and '60s called THE PROUD DECADES -

DWIGHT: *In general do you read factual material?*

JOHN: Everything, I don't read specific stuff. I don't read as much science fiction as I used to, I've swung into a historical thing. I've read a lot of **Gore Vidal** lately, starting with LINCOLN, because I have a fondness for **President Lincoln.** I'm not in any way an expert, but I have a great respect for the man. But I read a lot of weird stuff.

DWIGHT: *Have you a personal favorite story that you've done?*

JOHN: There are a bunch, actually, several stories that for different reasons I like above and beyond. The 20th anniversary issue of THE FANTASTIC FOUR is one of my personal favorites, just because everything came together. It's certainly not the best art job I've ever done, and it's not my best writing, but it was one of the best, and certainly one of the earliest, syntheses of the two. That little nine-page Luthor story that I did in the back of SUPERMAN is one of my favorites. There are different *pieces* of stories, different *bits* that I've done, that are dear to my heart, in many cases for reasons that are exclusively mine. The fans will go, "Eugh, why did you do *this?* Well, I thought it was kind of special.

DWIGHT: *What's next for John Byrne?*

JOHN: Well, I'm Mr. Avenger these days, with both AVENGERS books sort of under my control, my *mad* control. And SHE-HULK is turning out to be a *lot* of fun! That's really the book that I look forward to doing. When I started on WEST COAST AVENGERS I started having *most* of the fun with that, because I hadn't really started SHE-HULK, I was just sort of thinking about SHE-HULK. But as SHE-HULK has become crazier and crazier, I've been having more and more fun with it. So those three books, that's pretty much the future for me right now. *Always* there are projects floating in the back of my head, but right now I'm looking forward to actually entering a period where for the first time in about six years I will *not* have too much to do. I intend to *cherish* that for awhile.

DWIGHT: *What story* haven't *you done that you want to do?*

JOHN: Um . . . most of the themes that I've wanted to explore, I have touched on and will continue to re-explore. Nothing instantly springs to mind. Purely for the sake of making a million dollars this year, I've told both **Tom DeFalco** and **Jenette Kahn** that if they wanted to do a Wolverine/Batman crossover I would write and draw it, but that's neither here nor there. As I say, nothing really springs to mind.

DWIGHT: *What's happening with "The Last Galactus Story" these days?*

JOHN: Oh, God, who knows! I'm not doing THE FANTASTIC FOUR — Actually I *have* thought about doing "The Last Galactus Story" in THE WEST COAST AVENGERS, finishing it. If I run out of stories within the next year, I'm going to have Nova fall out of the sky and say, "Hi, I just came back from a hundred million years in the future and something funky's going on." I originally considered doing that as a FANTASTIC FOUR story, when EPIC was cancelled. I have a *scene* in mind which I thought was such a neat bit — I will now tell it and it will turn up in somebody else's story, but that's happened to me before.

Nova falls out of the sky, I was thinking that she would land on the Baxter Building, she's come *back* from a hundred million years in the future — or a hundred billion years in the future — and she's trying to get the FF to come and help Galactus against this rogue Watcher. She's speaking this strange language and the universal translator won't translate it. Reed ultimately realizes it's because she's speaking English, but it's English mutated by a hundred billion years. The translator doesn't translate it because it's English. Now that'll happen somewhere sometime. I'll do it in SHE-HULK, that'll mess everybody up. *(Laughter.)* She comes out of the movie THE LAST GALACTUS STORY and says, "Wow, what a great ending!" *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *We discussed earlier in this interview whether or not you would consider drawing for another writer — now, with WOLVERINE, you are.*

JOHN: Well, it was the right writer. I've always — for as long as I can remember, anyway — admired **Archie Goodwin's** stuff. I think he's one of the best (if not *the* best) writer in the biz. And it's just a thrill to work with him.

DWIGHT: *So what's going to happen in WOLVERINE?*

JOHN: I don't know exact details. I'm leaving that pretty much to Archie at this stage of the game. That's part of the experiment, really, to see whether I can just "just make pictures." I know that we're making him more bestial. And I

"I'm Mr. Avenger, with both AVENGERS

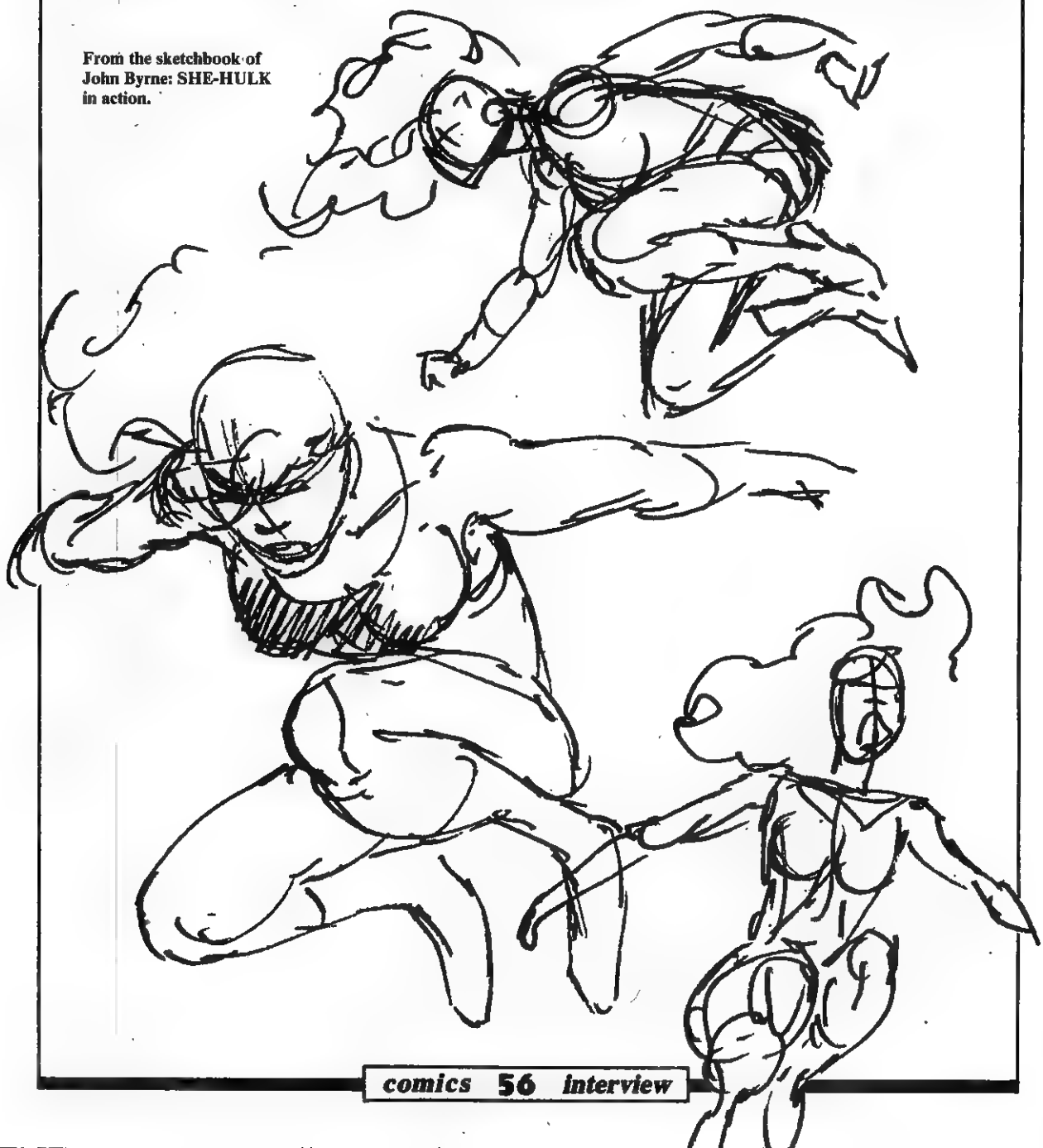
know that we've got an interesting villain in the first arc — to use TV talk. We've got a Nazi cyborg in the first arc who knows he's a cliché and loves it!

DWIGHT: *I also saw your cover for your first issue. He's leaping straight at us — and he's wearing his costume.*

JOHN: He's wearing the famous costume! Actually, I think he goes back into his costume before Archie and I come on. I think that the Powers That Be realize that the fans aren't too thrilled with a guy with an eye patch and a black t-shirt. Which is good for me because *I* designed that costume from the neck down.

DWIGHT: *What was the reason for you deciding to draw WOLVERINE?*

JOHN: Greed. *(Laughter.)* What I've been saying and what is the truth is that I felt that I'd like to sort of reclaim a little piece of this guy, this character, before he's all used up. Mostly because when I took over the drawing of the X-MEN — lo! these many years ago — Chris was in a mode of thinking that he'd inherited from **Dave Cockrum,** I think, that he wanted to write the character out. In those days, the X-MEN was pretty much NIGHTCRAWLER COMICS co-starring the X-Men. We used to kid about it, in fact. And Chris had said that he really didn't see any potential in Wolverine — didn't really see anything he could do with him. And being fiercely patriotic then, as I was in those days, I said, "No way are you going to write out the only Canadian in the book!" So I said just leave him to me. It was funny, the other day Peter Sanderson — who is doing the SAGA OF WOLVERINE — commented that he's very much aware of



From the sketchbook of John Byrne: SHE-HULK in action.

books under my control, my mad control."

my input. As my part in the plotting increases you can tell how Wolverine becomes less of a jerk and less of a punching bag and more and more the focus of the book. which was just me being Canadian for about five and a half minutes.

DWIGHT: *Five and a half minutes?*

JOHN: Well, that's what it seems like when I look back now.

DWIGHT: *So what kind of input do you have on the WOLVERINE stories now?*

JOHN: Absolutely nothing so far. Which is how I want it. I just want to do pictures, as I said. I think Archie's come up with some neat stuff. I've got three plots so far and I think they're all real spiffy. So for the moment at least the whole point of the experiment really is to see if I can just make the pictures and get my jollies out of just making the pictures.

Meanwhile on the AVENGERS, I'm just making the words, so it balances out. And on SHE-HULK and AVENGERS WEST COAST I'm doing both.

DWIGHT: *Are you in danger of spreading yourself too thin?*

JOHN: I don't think so. My most comfortable work load in the past has generally been around three books. I have spread myself too thin when I've done two books a month and I was writing, penciling and inking the stories. But right now it doesn't feel excessive.

DWIGHT: *I've seen some of the penciled pages of WOLVERINE and they really look nice.*

JOHN: Thank you. I'm taking a different approach with it — I'm trying to be looser with what I'm doing on this. It's not the "hard edge" stuff that I've done in the past. I'm trying to get more organic. So we'll see if it works. I've only seen one panel inked by Al Williamson so far, but I think it looks great.

DWIGHT: *Right — the illustration Marvel's sales department wanted.*

JOHN: Yeah. So they picked the goriest panel in the whole book. *(Laughter.)*

Above: The only Al Williamson inked panel. Below: More pencils from J.B.

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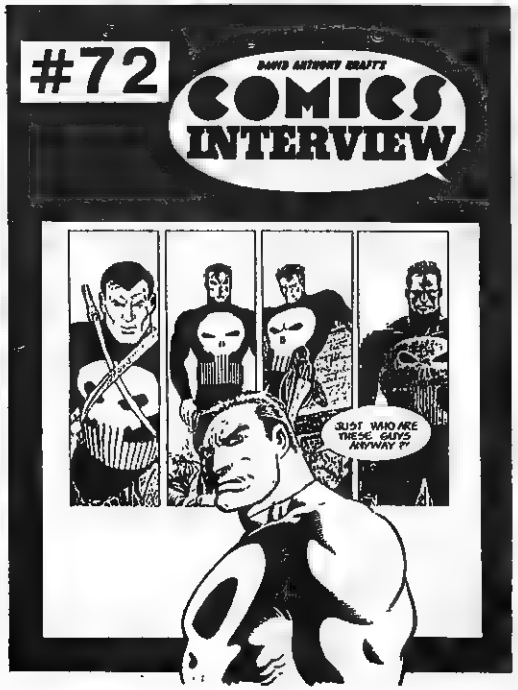

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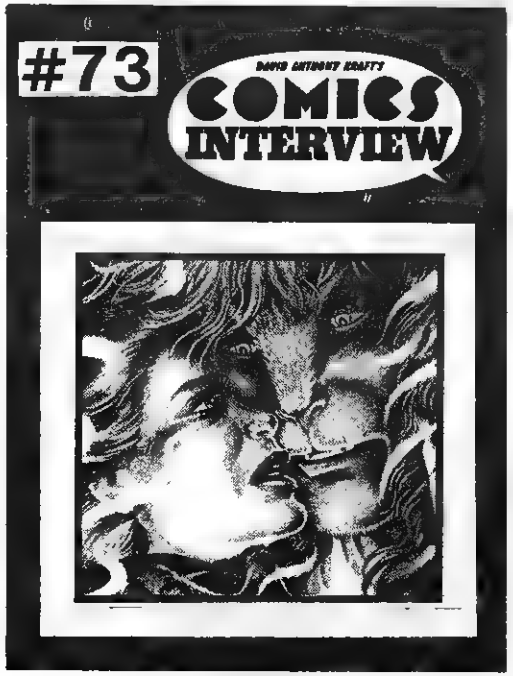

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LAST WORD

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AN OPEN LETTER TO MARV WOLFMAN

I am a loyal reader of the NEW TITANS comic book, a DC title! I am also the fan who writes in letters to the letters page and have been *blackballed* by **Barbara Kesel/Marv Wolfman** because my views about certain characters are different than theirs. How many readers out there have had a writer or editor say, "It's my book. I write/edit these comics. I am the one who decides what letters are printed and what letters are not"? This has happened to me! So I am going to try to get my letter printed in your LAST WORD letters page and hope you at COMICS INTERVIEW and the fans will understand and give me a chance to express my point of view. Here goes!

I wish to protest the constant mistreatment of the OLD TEEN TITANS (Harlequin, Bumblebee, The Original Bat-Girl - now Flamebird — Golden Eagle and Mal). I have written several letters to the TITANS title. None have seen print. Not to mention a dozen or so phone calls to **Barbara Kesel** and **Robert Greenberger** and all I got was a run around from these editors! Not to mention a lack of respect for my feelings and outlook about the old Teen Titans as by calling the characters stupid and dumb! I already know that **Marv Wolfman** hates them! I also know that **Bob Rozakis** wanted to bring them back as Titans West. He was *threatened* by the DC brass and was *silenced!* And now I hear that the Harlequin was banished from the Titans team and its history. Well I for one *have enough!* Are **Marv Wolfman/Kesel/Greenberger** so *afraid* that if my letter is printed other Titans fans will agree with me and show support for them? The *only reason* for these characters being second rate is because they have *never* been *revamped* or *used* in the Titans magazine for almost ten years! They have *never* been given a chance to shine! Are you so *close-minded,* **Mr. Wolfman?** Is it *so unfair* to ask this of you? *Doesn't my opinion count? I should think so!* It's *us*, the *fans*, who pay the *outrageous* price of $1.75 for your comic book! That gives you a *pay check* and a *job!* If you don't like the Harlequin, change her history/name to Jester or Wildcard. But keep the purple/green and white & black checkered look! After all you did it with the Huntress! Why not Duela? *Bring her back to the Titans!* Is this so *little* to ask for? Let's face it, folks, it's *time to grow up! Give these Titans a fair shake* and *act like mature adults!* I am sure the fans will agree with me about this, *after all, it's only fair!* I can be *mature* about it! How about you, Marv? Barbara? Robert? After all, I thought you were *open minded* people and you were *fair* to the DC characters that *fans* love and *support! After all, it's only the truth!*

Burt Bolen
Box #6 — 219 Orchard St.
Coal Grove, OH 45638

MARK NELSON: THE "REAL" STORY

Dear David:

I just read CI #68. The thing that interested me most was the interview with **Mark Nelson.**

I'm glad to see that someone was able to capture the wildman in print. Your interview with Mark let the rest of the industry in on what a fun guy ol' **Nelson** is to be around.

Some day when you are looking for the "real" story on **Nelson** and I mean the real behind-the-scenes sorta stuff . . . just let me know. (I bet you're sweatin' now, eh Mark?)

Keep up the good work and stay outta trouble.

Beau Smith, Sales Manager
Eclipse Comics Sales Ranch
P.O. Box 706
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Mark and Anita pose in their back yard with the third family member, Kika.

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

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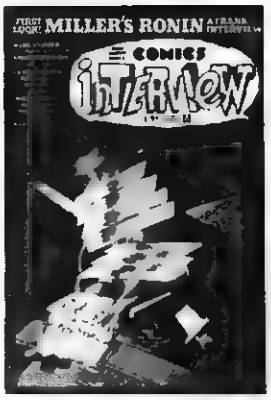
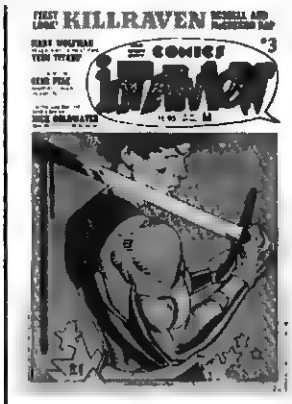
#1-$3.00 Keith Giffen on the making of THE OMEGA MEN — Steve Gerber speaks out on comics — X-MEN inker Terry Austin talks — Marvel's top man, Jim Galton, tells all — and much more in this premiere issue!



#2-$3.00 Miller raps about RONIN — Mark [illegible] shares secrets of Kirby's [illegible] — Steve Gerber asks [illegible] about DNA-GENTS — [illegible] Simmons of KISS on comics — [illegible] Cover by Frank Miller. SOLD OUT



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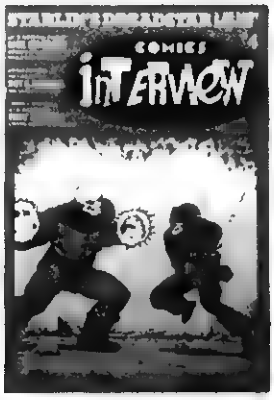

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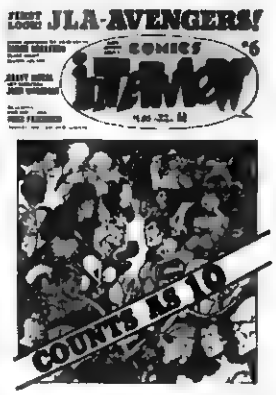

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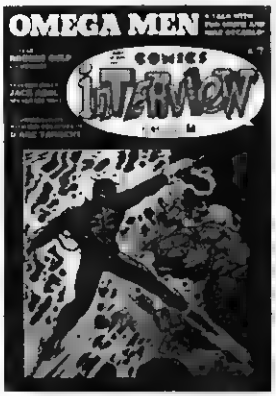

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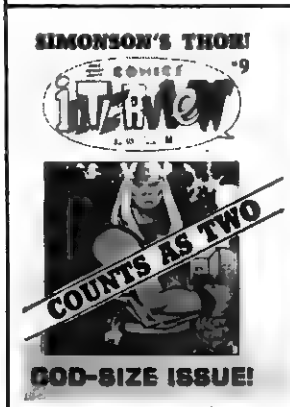

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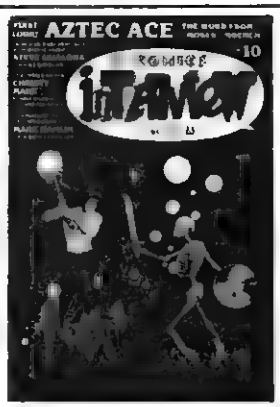

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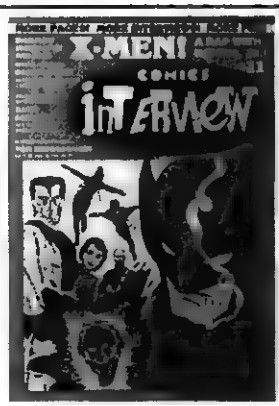

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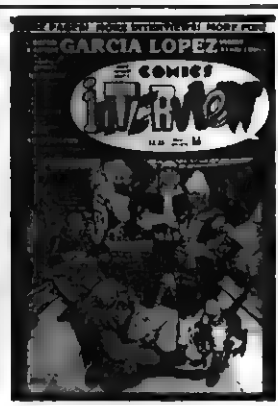

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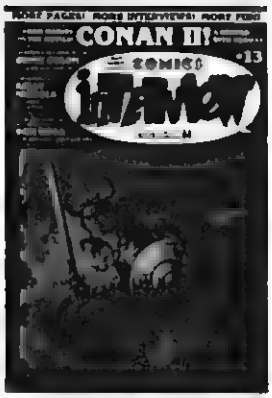

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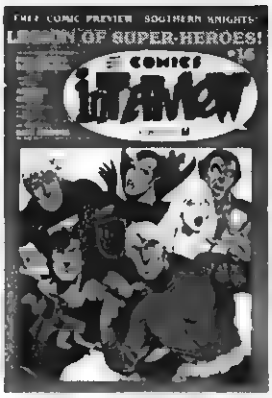

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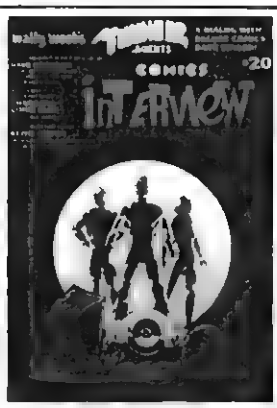

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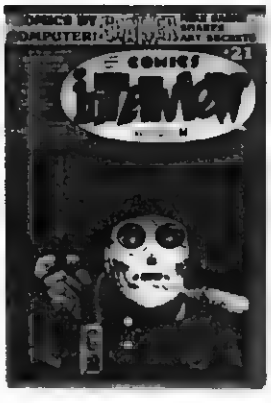

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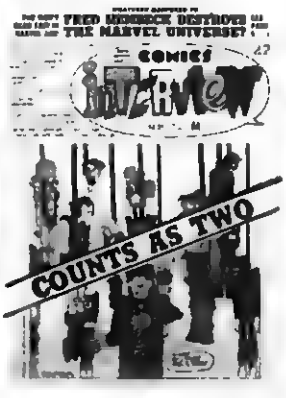

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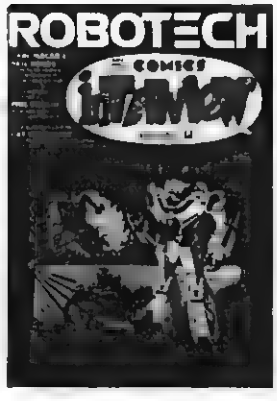

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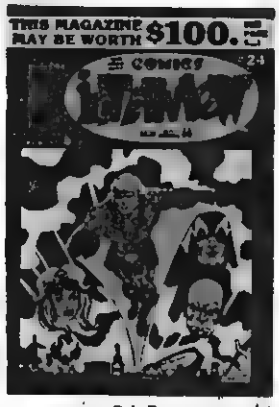

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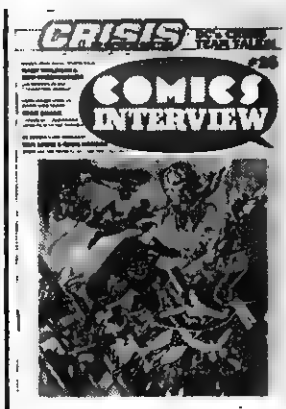

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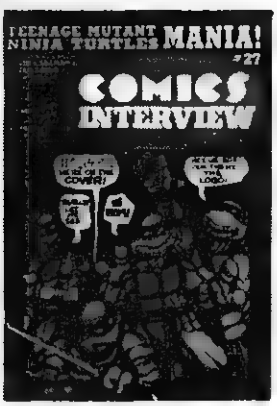

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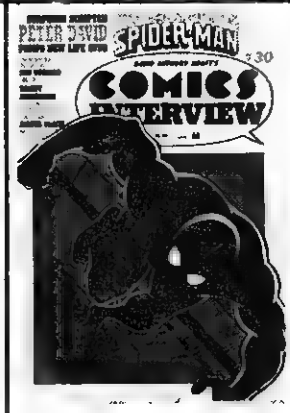

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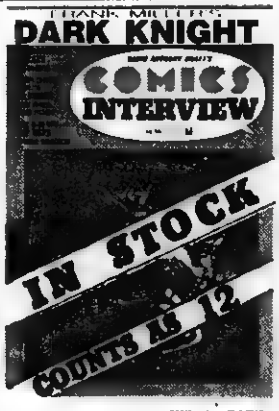

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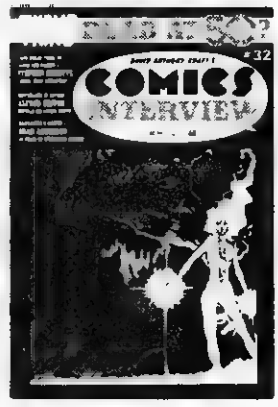

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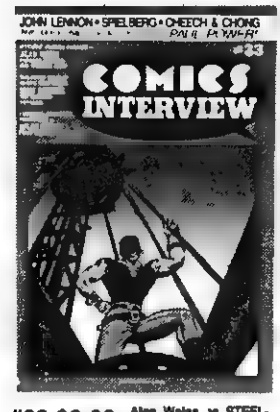

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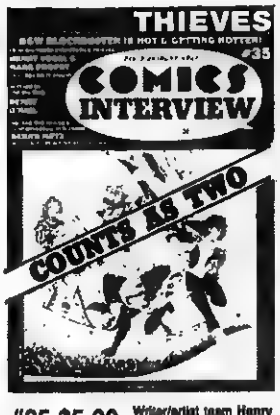

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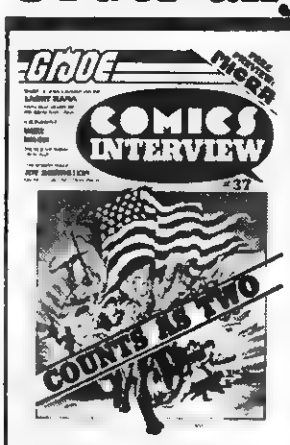

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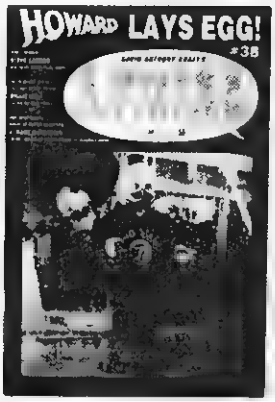

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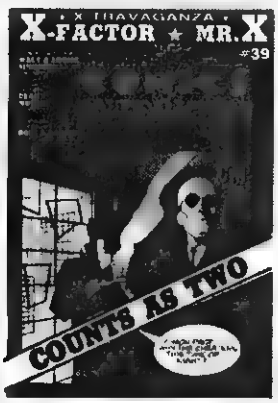

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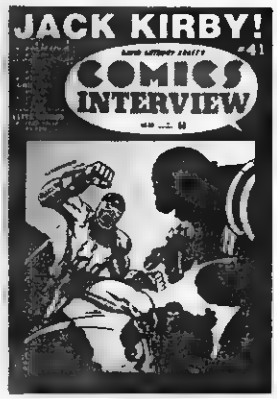

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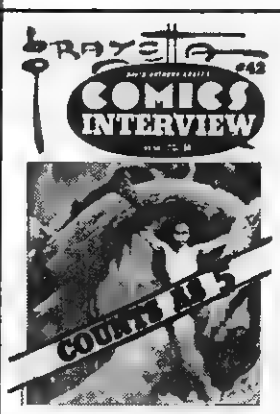

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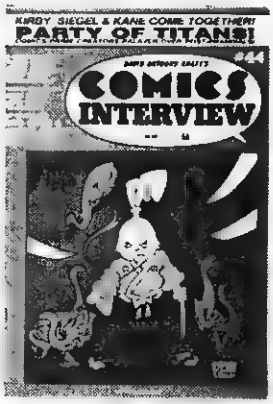

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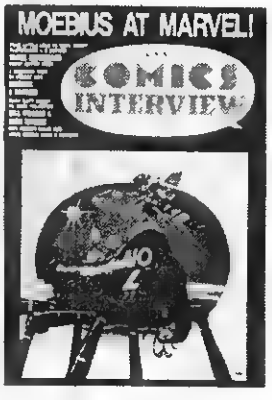

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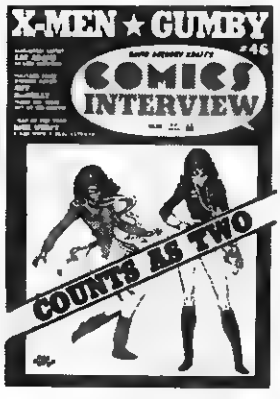

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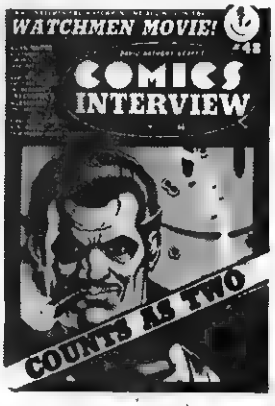

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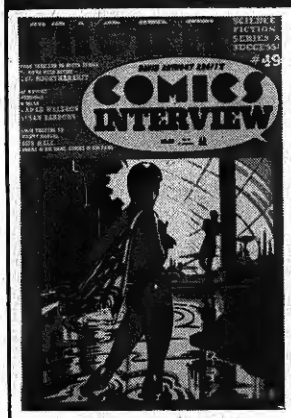

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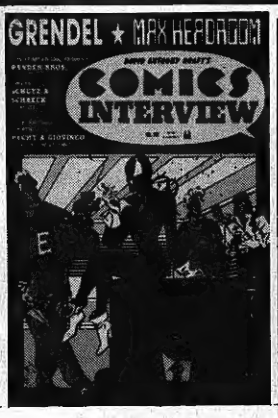

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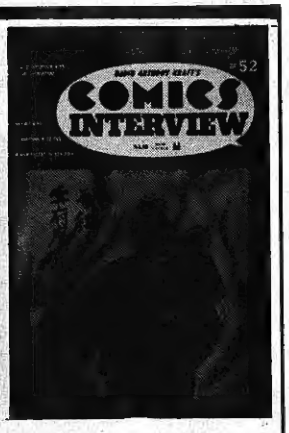

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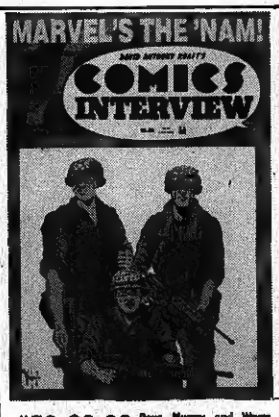

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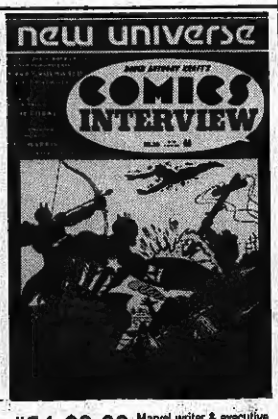

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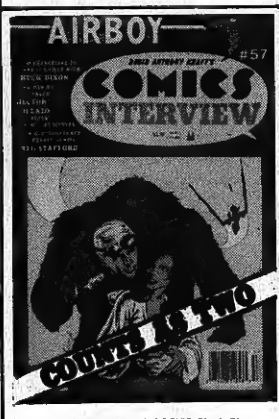

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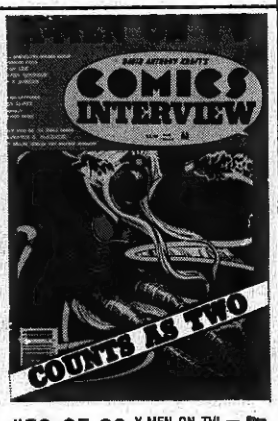

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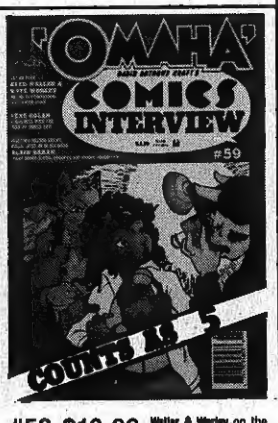

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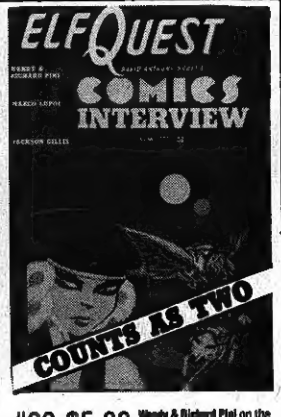

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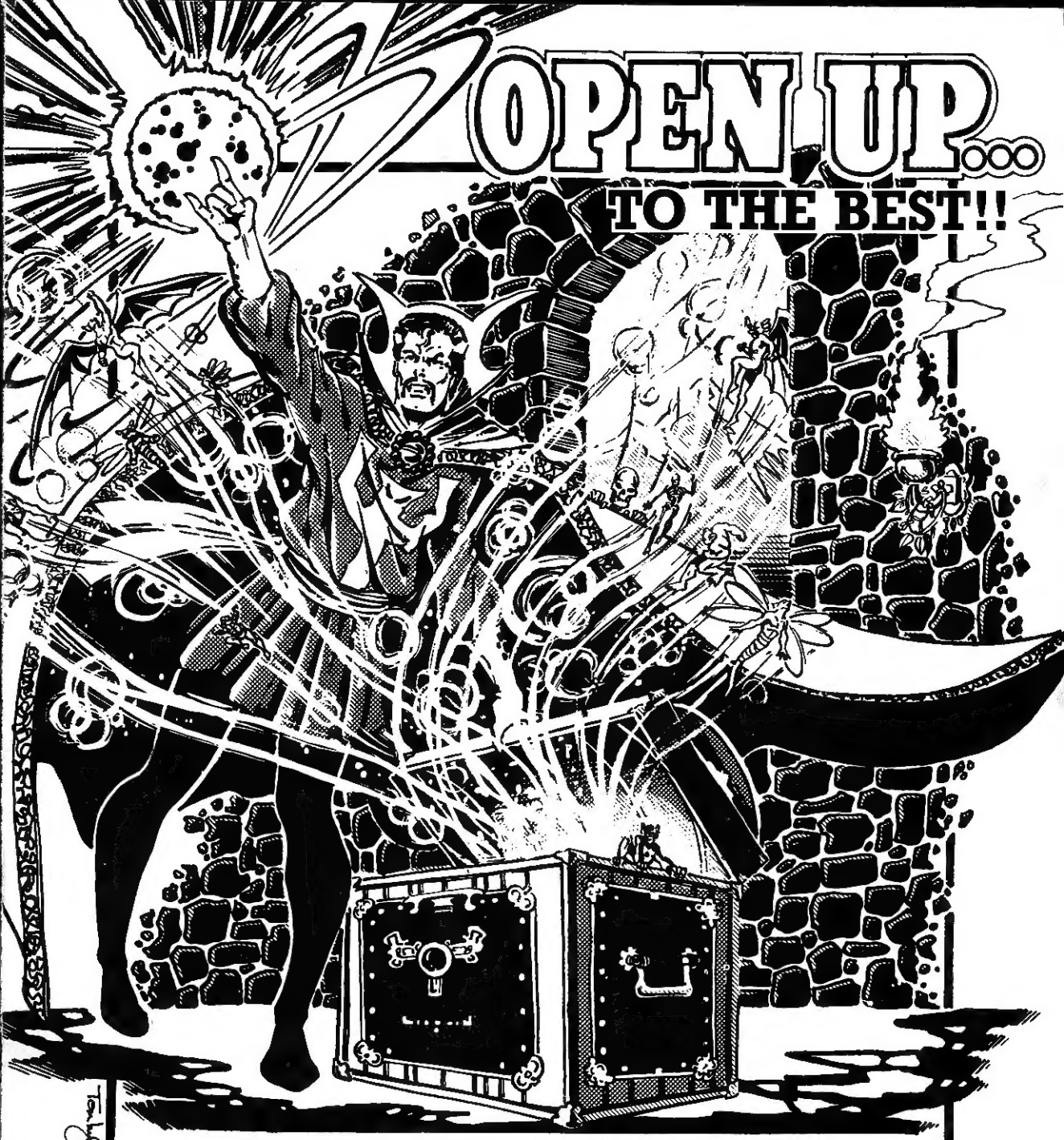

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